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THE

MANNER OF PRAYER:

AN INQUIRY

RELATIVE TO

THE BEST MEANS OF DISCHARGING THE DUTIES

OF

Public and Social Devotion.

BY

W. WALFORD,

LATE TUTOR IN THE ACADEMY AT HOMERTON.

"I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding."—1 *Cor.* xiv. 15.

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THIS VOLUME

IS RESPECTFULLY AND AFFECTIONATELY

Inscribed

TO

THE REV. J. P. SMITH, D.D.

AND TO

THE MINISTERS

WHO WERE EDUCATED JOINTLY BY HIM AND THE AUTHOR,

DURING

A RESIDENCE OF SEVENTEEN YEARS

IN THE

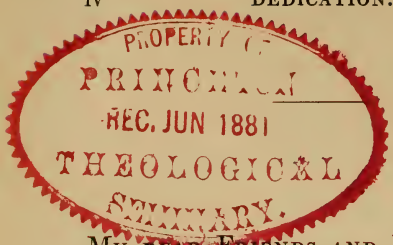
ACADEMY AT HOMERTON,

INSTITUTED FOR

THE EDUCATION OF CANDIDATES FOR THE PASTORAL OFFICE

AMONG

CONGREGATIONAL PROTESTANT DISSENTERS.



My dear Friends and Brethren,

I know of no persons under whose patronage I can so properly introduce this little work to those younger Ministers, and private Christians, for whose use it is chiefly designed, as yourselves. The connexion which I had with you in one of the most honourable and useful employments in which men can be engaged, and the many proofs of kind regard which I have received from you, induce me to believe that you will not reluctantly accept this slight testimony of my affection, and of the interest which I feel in your personal happiness, and

in the successful prosecution of the important duties of the profession to which you are devoted.

The numerous instances in which your sympathy was shown, during my long continued and desolating affliction, afforded me as much solace as my overwhelming calamity admitted. A remembrance of them is still very grateful to me, now that I am, through the singular mercy of God, restored to as much health of body and tranquillity of mind as I can reasonably hope to enjoy during the short remaining period of my life.

> " Labuntur anni: nec pietas moram
> Rugis et instanti senectæ
> Afferet, indomitæque morti."
>
> *Horat. Od.* lib. ii. 14.

Thrice happy! that we are not destined to exist always in so frail, so troubled,

and so inconstant a condition as the present state is found by us all to be; but that we have, through the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, a blessed hope of immortality in his presence. That we all may be guided by his wisdom, and guarded by his power, as long as we are passing through this land of shadows, is the earnest hope and fervent prayer of

Your ever affectionate Friend,

W. WALFORD.

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INTRODUCTION.

The many excellent books that are extant on the subject of prayer naturally produce some hesitation respecting the expediency of attempting to make an addition to them. The following considerations may, I hope, be thought to form a sufficient apology for the undertaking. Every writer, unless he condescends to be a servile imitator of the compositions of other men, has his own peculiar method of thought and expression; which, if it be less engaging to numerous classes of readers than that of their favourite

authors, may possibly exercise some attractive influence over others who are not so pre-engaged, or who may not be very conversant with books on such a subject.

The progress of "the great innovator—Time," introduces new tastes, which it is desirable to gratify by a succession of writings, which, if not equalling in worth the productions of former days, are yet invested with the charm of novelty, that may excite attention, which is in vain solicited for the compositions of past years.

I may further observe, that no work, which has an object precisely similar to that which I contemplate, has come within the reach of my information: and I have been assured by very competent authority, that such a work, if executed with tolerable ability, is called for, and promises no inconsiderable degree of usefulness. Should I unfortunately subject myself to unfavourable criticism, I shall

still be consoled by the consciousness that I have, in this instance, pursued the same course, with uprightness of intention, in which the greater part of my life has been spent—by endeavouring to instruct the less informed, and to confirm in wisdom and goodness those, to whose age, experience, and superior attainments, I have been desirous of paying all becoming deference and respect.

The definite object that I have in view is, chiefly, to offer some remarks, the results of a good many years' experience, not passed altogether without observation, on the most becoming manner of conducting public and social engagements of devotion. By public engagements of devotion, I intend the prayers, the offering of which forms so important a part of the public duty of christian ministers; and by social engagements, I mean the prayers that are presented by Christians in general, at private devotional assemblies, as well as those which are offered

by the heads of families, when surrounded only by their relatives and domestics. That a very considerable part of the pleasure and usefulness attendant on such engagements is derived from a wise and becoming method of conducting them, is too evident to be questioned.

Devotional acts consist of exercises of the heart, and of the understanding; faculties which are susceptible of daily improvement, where attention is directed to them, and the proper means are employed. It is of great importance to the aid of improvement, that correct notions of the particular objects to be attained should be formed, and that habits of attention to them should be acquired. Unless this be done, there is little reason to hope that knowledge will increase, or that improper and unbecoming methods of discharging these duties will be corrected. Our intellectual and moral powers were imparted to us for the purpose of improvement; and every spiritual endowment is both susceptible

of increase, and adapted to it. We shall be found negligent of due regard to the divine Author of all our endowments, if we fail in attempting to improve them; we shall lose the pleasure which ever accompanies the conscious increase of intelligence, and the cultivation of pure and holy affections, regulated by wisdom and propriety; and we shall deprive our fellow-worshippers of much of the satisfaction and edification which they might derive from our association with them, if we abide satisfied with our present attainments, and indifferent to their increase.

An obligation of the most forcible and stringent nature lies upon the professed disciples of the blessed Redeemer, to employ his mediation, by presenting to the throne of mercy, in his name, the most perfect services which they are able to bring. It is a very unbecoming return for the inestimable blessings which his condescension, labours, and sufferings have procured for us, to be indifferent even to

the manner in which we attempt to discharge the duties of devotion. No indifference was found in him; his devotional exercises were marked, not merely by deep submission and perfect reverence for God, but his manner was equally distinguished by "meekness of wisdom," and a subdued chasteness both of sentiment and diction. Nothing can be conceived of so remote from inflated language, from swelling words of vanity, from an affectation of ingenious turns or pretty conceits, or from that boisterous magniloquence, which too frequently usurps the place of deep and pathetic expression, as the petitions which our Lord Jesus Christ instructed his disciples to employ, and of which he set before them the most exquisite example. Happy and honoured shall we be if we are found endeavouring, in some small degree, to imitate his grace and dignity!

There is reason to apprehend that inattention to such considerations is far

too frequent; and not a few of really pious persons are found who permit themselves to settle down in listless apathy, and to remain content with the extremely deficient attainments which they have made, in reference to such duties of their christian profession. My object will be attained if the composition and perusal of these pages should have the effect of persuading a few such worthy, but somewhat mistaken persons, that they are really capable of better things, and are not beyond the reach of improvement, if they strenuously exert themselves to obtain it.

The observation with which I shall terminate these preliminary remarks, relates to the interest which it becomes us to feel for the honour of our profession and practice, as Dissenters from the Established Church of our country. I wish we had it in our power both to think and say that the reproaches which are not unfrequently cast by the less candid of our conforming brethren upon the manner in which some

of our public devotional services are performed, were altogether unsustained by truth. Our nonconformity may, I am well assured, be defended by most cogent reasons, and shown to combine a reverential regard for the decisions of conscience—the impregnable bulwark of our common Protestantism—with a noble and disinterested attachment to civil freedom. Were our practice but as correct as our principles are irrefragable, we should seldom have to complain that our assemblies are not overflowing, or that our churches are few in number, or inconsiderable in extent.

I shall be forgiven, I hope, when I say, that the book of Common Prayer, which is the indispensable and exclusive instrument of public devotion in the Church of England, combines many patterns of pure, simple, and fervent devotion, with numerous very grievous errors and improprieties. While I express my extreme surprise that so many upright, intelligent, and acute

clergymen can declare their "unfeigned assent and consent" to all the contents of that heterogeneous, though in some parts, exquisite volume, I am far from wondering that having once scaled this apparently insurmountable barrier, they should frequently extol the formularies of devotion which it comprehends, or that the less pious and scrupulous among them should, whenever a favourable opportunity occurs, institute comparisons prejudicial to non-conforming worship. It is truly an employment of little difficulty for an astute and practised intellect to assemble on one side all that is beautiful and attractive, concealing or explaining away whatever of contrary character might be detected by inquisitive scrutiny, and then to contrast this partial portraiture with all that can be found of low, or feeble, or unpolished character, among the advocates of an unendowed profession. My object, however, is not to censure what appear to me to be the inconsistencies of those from whom we

dissent, but to provoke to jealousy my more immediate brethren, that they may aim, by increased intelligence, and attention to the graces of devotion, to exalt their own profession, by means which even the most uncandid followers of established system shall be compelled to admire.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE DUTY OF PRAYER.

The principal object which these pages have in view is, as has been intimated, to promote the improvement of the disciples of Christ in the discharge of public and social devotion; but before we enter directly on a consideration of this leading theme, it will not be foreign from the purpose to engage in an investigation of the reasons why we should pray; of the pre-requisites of prayer; and of the objects, as well as of the several parts, which public and social prayer comprehend. Such an investigation will promote the

general purpose of this Essay, by bringing into view the supreme importance of prayer, and the consequent propriety of using those means by which it may be performed in the fittest manner. I purpose, therefore, to devote this, and the succeeding two chapters, to the inquiries that have just been specified.

I. An investigation of the reasons why we should pray demands our attention. Prayer is largely taken to include adoration of the Divine perfection and character, of thanksgiving, and other constituent parts of the exercise of devotion: taken strictly, it means only petition, or supplication for the blessings that we need. The latter sense is that to which our attention is at present invited. The Scriptures leave no room for doubt that it is the duty of all men to pray, or that fervent prayer, arising from a belief of his declarations, is ever acceptable to God, and ensures the bestowment of his blessing. We might leave the matter here,

and rely, with entire satisfaction, on this clearest and surest proof of the duty in question; but as not a few attempts have been made to represent the practice of prayer as irrational and useless, it may be beneficial to indicate some of the principal arguments derived from reason, by which the propriety and necessity of it may be vindicated. Young persons, more especially of some thought and intelligence, are liable to the direct attacks of infidelity, as well as to the insidious insinuations that are widely diffused by the press, and covertly, if not openly, advanced in the converse of the world. On this account it becomes necessary for those who occupy the place of christian instructors, to guard the inexperienced and ingenuous inquirer against the destructive snares which he will scarcely fail to encounter in his passage through life. To urge to the determined adversaries of revelation the authority of the sacred volume of inspiration is vain; they are

clad in armour that turns aside such an instrument of warfare; so that it is indispensable to meet them on the ground of reason, which they arrogate to themselves, and to contend with them by weapons, to the force of which, their arguments, if not themselves, are not invulnerable. Besides this, in the present dark and enfeebled condition of human nature, a variety of prejudices, the sources of sceptical objection to whatever is most sacred, are incessantly performing their natural employment of hardening the heart, and retaining men at a criminal and dangerous distance from intercourse with the Father of their spirits. These foes to human happiness, both present and future, are not to be subdued by ignorance, or put down without serious inquiry: they offer themselves as the suggestions of reason, and can be effectually eradicated from their strongholds only by a clear detection of their contrariety to all that is most reasonable.

The objection against the exercise of prayer, which has the greatest plausibility, is professed to be drawn from a consideration of the unchangeableness of God. It is urged that, prior to our prayers, he has determined either that things shall happen agreeably to our desires, or that they shall be repugnant to them. If the first be the state of the case, prayer is superfluous, as we shall have what we wish to obtain without it; if the second be the decision of Heaven, that decision cannot be reversed by any supplications of ours. Before I suggest what I believe to be a sufficient reply to this objection, I request attention to a few general remarks respecting the reasonableness of prayer; remarks that are not directly aimed at this objection, but which will contribute some aid towards that reply which I shall afterwards offer in immediate relation to it.

1. It will be admitted by all with whom I should undertake to argue this point,

that God is the supreme Proprietor and Governor of all things. He alone is possessed of the power, wisdom, and goodness, whence benefits can be expected to proceed. Not less certain is it that men are altogether needy, and dependant on his will. The favours that he has already imparted to us, and which his universal bounty is incessantly renewing, afford an unanswerable proof that he is neither indifferent towards us, nor indisposed to communicate his gifts to us. He has so constituted our nature, that, with the exception of atheists, unbelievers, and such persons as are addicted only to vicious indulgences, by which the better tendencies of their nature have been overwhelmed, men have universally concurred in judgment, that prayer is neither unreasonable nor useless. In agreement with this natural sentiment, they have been found, from the earliest ages to the present time, engaging in devotional services. It is also a fact that cannot

be questioned, that in all ages and countries the best and wisest men have been numbered among those whose regard to devotion has been most earnest, and their performance of its duties most constant.

We may add to these proofs of the natural tendency of the mind to draw conclusions favourable to the practice of devotion, the many instances in which the latent sentiments of the soul have been developed in seasons of distress and imminent danger, by men of previously irreligious and infidel character. Such men, in the days of health and apparent security, are wont to ridicule the practice of piety, and cast contempt on what they regard as superstitious, or fanatical imbecility. But when danger has threatened them, or death has placed its terrors in array before them, they have, in numberless cases, betrayed the most terrific apprehensions; have loudly called for the mercy which they derided, and have offered to the neglected and insulted Sovereign of

the world the most impassioned supplications for relief and safety. In such instances nature asserts its power, and conscience, painfully excited, pays a last and reluctant homage to the truth that was obscured by the infatuating influences of infidelity and impiety, or disregarded amidst the clamour and contention of domineering passions.

II. The influence which a constant regard to the exercises of devotion exerts, in aid of moral and religious improvement, furnishes a clear and decisive testimony to its reasonableness and propriety. The daily practice of prayer brings the soul into the immediate presence of the infinitely perfect Being, under circumstances most favourable for producing vivid and permanent impressions of his supreme moral excellence; for it is inconsistent with the nature of our mental faculties to be brought into frequent intercourse with God, without an elevation of soul in some degree corresponding with his character.

Association with such a Being will necessarily influence the thoughts and feelings; and serious reflections on the majesty, omnipresence, and all-sufficiency of the Deity, cannot fail to produce such a remembrance of him as will habitually act upon the temper of the mind. An elevation of religious and moral sentiment will gradually take place, and a transformation of the soul into a resemblance, remote indeed, yet real, of the Divine perfection, will afford the surest pledge of the beneficial effects of enlightened and fervent prayer. The important and essential duty of self-government will also come into increasing exercise, while frequent intercourse with him, to whom our most retired thoughts and purposes are known, stimulates to the attainment of the knowledge of ourselves, and to a strict scrutiny of our active principles and habitual conduct.

It may further be observed, that the beneficial influence of devotional habit

will not be confined to the formation and increase of due sentiments in relation to God and to ourselves, but will extend itself over the whole sphere of human duty. He who constantly and earnestly prays for himself will certainly not fail to pray for others; and intercession for our friends and fellow-creatures will widen the circle of benevolent affections, and dispose us to regard the whole human race as a fraternity, the well-being of which we shall seek to advance in proportion to the opportunities that present themselves for this purpose. It must indeed be admitted that such effects can be looked for from no other species of devotion than that which is illuminated by just conceptions of the Divine nature, and is altogether under the control of consistency and sincerity. To become beneficial, prayer must be serious, earnest, and free from the alloy of superstition and vain pretence. Any other kind of what may be misnamed devotion cannot be conceived

of as pleasing to the great Object of it, or capable of producing the moral and elevating effects that have been spoken of. Unenlightened, insincere, or formal devotion tends only to sustain groundless expectations, and to deteriorate rather than improve the character. Whether the influence that has now been assigned to genuine devotion is one of the delusions of fancy, or the just estimate which an enlightened understanding forms, must be submitted to the decision of my readers, every one of whom that is disposed to comply with the evident conclusions of reason, will, I have little hesitation in saying, determine that the obligations to devotion derive a powerful support from the considerations that have been suggested.

III. The next step of our progress is, to offer a sufficient reply to the objection against the practice of prayer, which is drawn from the unchangeable character and purposes of the Most High.

1. That the character of the Governor of the world is immutable, and his purposes unalterable, I not merely admit, but strenuously maintain. There can be no rational doubt that the government of God over the universe is regulated, even in its minutest details, by a fixed and irrevocable plan. To imagine the contrary would be to invest the all-perfect wisdom and intelligence with the short-sightedness, weakness, and versatility of mortals. May so absurd and irrational a notion be removed to the utmost from us! If we are unable to combine human duty with divine perfection, let us not attempt to lower the standard of the one, or to countenance opinions that are subversive of the supremacy of the other. It is far from being indispensable for us to remove all difficulties which may appear to press on theological subjects; and to decline the performance of what is clearly perceived to be a duty of paramount obligation, till we can reconcile all

the seeming discrepancies of the divine government to our narrow faculties, will prove only, to unprejudiced and sagacious observers, that we wish to evade the performance of an irksome task, by apologies that are entirely insignificant and powerless.

2. Before we proceed to draw any conclusions from the admitted unchangeableness of God, and the fixed plan on which he conducts the affairs of the world, it will be well to understand clearly what is intended by such a plan. The objection that we have now to encounter proceeds on the presumption, that the plan of the divine government has provided only for ends, and that the means of effecting them form no part of the original design. Such an arrangement is, however, completely at variance with our notions of divine government, and altogether contrary to what experience teaches us to be the modes by which the divine purposes are effected. We perceive in

the actual progress of the plan of Providence, that every good which is attainable by men is to be sought for by the use of means, which appear to be suited to the end that they have in view. In very many cases we cannot, indeed, be certainly assured that the end will follow the employment of the means which experience teaches us to employ. In innumerable instances, the connexions that regulate the occurrence of events are so far beyond our limited information, that disappointment not unfrequently takes place after the most strenuous endeavours to obtain, by means apparently fitted to our purpose, the objects of our desire. But though this cannot be controverted, we do not conceive ourselves to be warranted to expect the acquisition of any valuable object of pursuit, without the use of appropriate means. Probability leads to a hope that we shall succeed in our efforts, when they are prudently directed; and the man is universally regarded as little

short of insanity, who looks for the end without employing the means by which it is generally obtained. Nor is he looked upon in a very different manner who greatly needs some advantage which might possibly be attained, but is induced, either by the weakness of his understanding, or the indolence of his temper, to forego the probable benefit because he is unable to discern the absolute certainty of success in the pursuit of it.

That Divine Providence has arranged a plan sufficiently comprehensive to include all events is, as has been admitted, incontrovertible; but because we discern the truth of this position, it is far from following that we are in possession of all the details of the plan. It is most certain that we know next to nothing respecting it; and our ignorance is very often, without doubt, the cause of the failures that we suffer. Yet we persist in believing that there is a dependance of ends on means, though in so many cases we are

unable to trace it. If, then, it can be shown that any specific good is probably attainable, and that we shall be reduced to the lowest degree of indigence and misery unless we can obtain it, what is the course that reason dictates? However great the difficulty may be in speculation, there is no ground of hesitation about the practice that we are to adopt. An agriculturist is desirous that his land should produce an abundant crop; does he stay his processes of manuring, ploughing, and sowing, till he has ascertained what is the intention of God with respect to his fields? Does he expect that the event will prove similar, whether he employs the means of rendering the soil productive, or neglects them? Will he sit down with folded arms, and say, if God has decreed that my fields shall be loaded with a smiling and plentiful harvest, it will be so, whether I labour or continue to sit at my ease; but that if he has determined otherwise, all my exertions will prove unavailing? Similar interro-

gations might be put in relation to all the pursuits that engage the attention of men, and the replies would in every case correspond. Let the case then of the special favours that we need at the hands of God be put, and what will be the result? Why, that if we would reap, we must first plough and sow. We know it is admitted beforehand that the event of our prayers is predetermined, and forms a part of the vast scheme of Providence; and as that scheme is concealed from us, we cannot, with absolute certainty, predict what will be the precise effect of our exertions: but this forms no reason why we should neglect to employ them, for we know that if we do not, no rational hope can be maintained that we shall attain the benefits of which we desire to be the possessors.

You wish, then, to acquire the favour and protection of the Most High; you earnestly long to obtain the most valuable blessings for yourselves, and for your

friends; you are fully assured that God alone is able to impart them, and that there is not a shadow of hope that you can derive them from any other source; you are aware that there is an established order of means and ends; and though you cannot obtain an infallible assurance that your requests will in all cases be followed by success, still you have reason to think that the probabilities are all on your side; while you are, or may be, most fully assured, that if, on any pretence whatever, you neglect to employ the means, you must be content to forego the blessings which, you say, you are earnestly desirous of obtaining.

3. We may now remark, in application to this objection, that the design of prayer is not to effect any change in the purposes and plan of the great Governor of the world; these are known to be unchangeable. The purposes of God are, however, surrounded by a cloud, through which no exertions of ours can penetrate;

and as there is no possibility of knowing what they are, so it would be, in a manner, infinitely absurd for us to imagine that we should determine our conduct by a reference to what is so immeasurably beyond the grasp of our comprehension. One general purpose of God we collect indeed from what analogy teaches us—that if we voluntarily abide in ignorance and impiety, misery must inevitably follow. We are, moreover, sensible that the relation in which wicked men stand to their Creator and Sovereign is widely different from that in which pious and upright men are placed towards the same Being; and it would be the very consummation of absurdity to suppose that such a diversity of relation involves no diversity of retribution. The proper object, then, of prayer is to produce an alteration, not in God, but in ourselves, and a change of the relation in which we stand towards him, so long as we abide in a condition of opposition to his nature and will.

IV. I shall conclude this inquiry respecting the reasons why we should pray, by a brief consideration of the question—Whether it is not more consonant with reason to suppose that God will bestow the gifts of his bounty on those who constantly and sincerely seek him, than on such as disregard his worship, and live as though he were altogether inattentive to the moral and religious distinctions that are found among men? If we build our conclusions, in reference to this question, on considerations drawn from the principles on which men universally act towards each other, it is at once decided. No one in possession of his understanding will undertake to maintain that men approve of those who treat them with disregard or negligent contempt; or that they are indifferent or averse to others, who express, by every means in their power, the sentiments of esteem, veneration, and affection, which they entertain towards them. This would be to abandon every

suggestion, both of respect for themselves, and of benevolence, not to say of justice, towards others. In nothing are mankind more agreed than the propriety of showing kindness to those who evince a disposition respectful and friendly to them; or to mark their sense of the improper behaviour of others, by a corresponding deportment. The reverse would be monstrous, and is indeed impracticable. Now as this universal sentiment is founded on the principles that are essential to human nature, we are justified in looking upon it as a clear indication of the Divine propensity, to put a prominent difference between those who diligently cultivate the favour of their Creator and Lord, and those who act towards him as if they were independent of him, and under no obligation of reason or duty to pay attention to his honour and will.

A prevalent belief has obtained among the more cultivated nations, both of ancient and modern times, that God is the

universal Parent and Father: but certainly all analogy on which this appellation is founded must be taken away if he, unlike a wise and affectionate parent, should act in a manner so subversive of his rectitude and goodness as to regard the evil and the good alike.

Before I quit this part of the subject it may be proper, in order to obviate any misconception of the arguments that have been urged in support of the practice of prayer, to observe, that the discussion has been carried on upon the principles, not of revelation, but such as are admitted by all those adversaries of it who profess to believe that the world is an emanation of divine power and energy, and that God is the natural and moral governor of it. With those misguided and unhappy persons who fancy that the universe is the offspring of chance, or nature, or laws without a lawgiver, or an effect without any cause whatever, I have no design of contending in these pages. A very

great mistake will, however, be made, if any of my readers should imagine that I discredit the claims of the inspired volume, or that I would, for a moment, hesitate to avow my full assurance of its paramount authority, or of the inexpressible advantages that result from it. My object was, indeed, distinctly stated at the commencement of this inquiry, and the necessity of repeating it arises from a wish that I may be clearly understood; as I have noticed, with concern, in some pious and excellent Christians, indications of a sentiment almost akin to a morbid feeling, when they have witnessed any attempts to establish moral and religious obligations upon the basis of reason; as if all such endeavours were prompted by a wish to diminish the supreme authority of revelation, and to claim a vantage ground for the deductions of our feeble and most limited intelligence. "He that takes away reason to make way for revelation puts out the light of both, and

does much-what the same as if he would persuade a man to put out his eyes, the better to receive the remote light of an invisible star by a telescope."—*Locke, Hum. Und.* book iv. chap. 19.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE PREREQUISITES OF PRAYER.

Some of my readers will, I fear, have been wearied by the rather abstract discussion to which their attention has been directed; but we are unable, by any process materially different, to establish the right of placing the duty of prayer on the ground of reason, as well as on that of revelation. How far this brief effort to accomplish what I cannot but regard as an object of very great importance is successful, I respectfully submit to the determination of those who may be qualified to form a correct judgment on the subject. We

now proceed to topics of easier elucidation, and on which the dictates of the holy Scriptures will form our infallible rules of guidance.

On examining what are, I think, with sufficient propriety here styled the prerequisites of prayer, we find them to be of two classes; the one consists of those dispositions and states of the soul which are indispensable to the offering of acceptable prayer; and the other, of those attainments which, though not of so indispensable a character, are yet of very great importance.

I. Our first inquiry relates to the indispensable prerequisites of prayer. No one who is accustomed to peruse the sacred Scriptures with due attention can fail to have noticed that the state and disposition of the soul are there represented as things of essential importance in relation to prayer. We are taught that "the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord: but the prayer

of the upright is his delight:"* that, "if I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me."† The man who engages in prayer is warned to pray "in faith, nothing wavering."‡ These, and many similar passages of Scripture, render it abundantly plain that there are states and dispositions of the soul essential to the exercise of prayer. We may sum them up under the heads of,—a deep consciousness of our own necessities,—a belief that God is both able and willing to supply our necessities if we diligently seek him,—and an earnest and permanent desire of obtaining this supply in the way which God has appointed. These are indispensable prerequisites of all acceptable devotion.

1. A deep consciousness of our own necessities is essential to acceptable devotion. There exist but too many proofs that prayer is often presented to God as

* Prov. xv. 8. † Ps. lxvi. 18. ‡ James i. 6.

a species of bribe to induce him to impart his favour; in other cases it is offered with a self-sufficient temper, not as an expression of want, but as a gift or service, which, however performed, must of necessity be agreeable to him; and in some instances it is substituted as a commutation for practices which the worshippers are aware to be displeasing to God, but to which they are secretly resolved to adhere, with an expectation, rather implied than expressed, that he will esteem such services as the expiations of guilt which is thus habitually contracted. It would be well if the inattentive and misguided adherents of forms of devotion, established and sanctioned by ecclesiastical authority, would seriously inquire if their endless repetitions of such forms are not justly liable to be attributed to some such causes as have been specified. It is very far from being my design to insinuate that the devotional forms, either of the Catholic communion or of the Protestant

Establishment of England, necessarily contribute either to the formation or maintenance of the ignorant prejudices to which I have alluded: but it might prove a beneficial exercise of mind if those persons who are superstitiously devoted to them would inquire how far their continued performance of these rites is productive of any fruits of moral and spiritual improvement. We may assuredly conclude, that where this is not the case, in some perceptible degree, there is a melancholy want of that "keeping of the heart with all diligence," which the holy Scriptures describe as "the source of the issues of life."

Superstition, ignorance, and insincerity, are not, however, exclusively found among the devotees of established formularies. These are blemishes too congenial to the native indolence and repugnance of the heart to acts of spirituality, to belong entirely to any class of profession. The many inconsistencies that are apparent in

the conduct of numbers who separate themselves from the communions that have been noticed, too clearly indicate that some essential mistake vitiates their religious performances, and renders them entirely unproductive of benefit, however free they may be from the trammels of instituted forms, or how much soever the persons that engage in them may pride themselves upon the liberty which they enjoy. Immoral, careless, and worldly behaviour furnishes a condemning evidence, whatever the exterior of nominal profession may be, that "the heart is not right with God."

It is, it might be thought, so clearly evinced by the Scriptures, that nothing short of a due and lowly sense of our inexpressible guilt and helplessness can conduce to devotional services agreeable to the infinite holiness and majesty of God, as to need no further proof, did not accumulated experience show, that amidst the full splendour of light which the

gospel has shed over the darkness of men, they still continue, in great multitudes, unconscious of their poverty, and insensible to the heavenly attractions of the Divine message. What can be so clear as the statements that are made by Christ himself of the necessity of humility, and a lowly estimate of ourselves? Can any additional proof be wanted that such a state of mind is essential to acceptable devotion, when we hear him saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit?"* or when our attention is directed to the severe rebuke which he addressed, after his ascension, to some of the ignorant and self-sufficient persons who prided themselves on their attainments? "Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."†

* Matt. v. 3. † Rev. iii. 17.

An attentive consideration of the proper nature and design of prayer would dispel these clouds of ignorance, and scatter those baneful prejudices in which inconsiderate mortals take refuge. Prayer, as the strict meaning of the word implies, is the addressing of petitions to the Author of all good, significant of our necessities, and expressive of our sense of insufficiency and unworthiness. The dictates of revelation assure us, that when we have done all that is required, we are bound to look upon ourselves as "unprofitable servants:" how much more does it become us to humble ourselves in the sight of the righteous Sovereign and Lawgiver, whose instructions we have slighted, and whose precepts we have violated, in instances more than we can enumerate! If an examination of our past conduct and our present state be instituted with sincerity and due precision, we shall learn that we are "laden with iniquity," that our "transgressions exceed the number of

the hairs upon our heads," and that our spiritual and moral faculties are so disordered and broken, that "from the crown of the head, to the feet," we are polluted and vitiated on every side. We shall then listen to that awful voice which declares, that "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men."* If we make experiment of our spiritual strength, and of the force of our most stedfast purposes, we shall discover that our strength is weakness, and that "when we would do good, evil is present with us."† We shall be impressed by an alarming conviction that life is fast ebbing, and that the current of time is rapidly and irresistibly bearing us on towards the ocean of interminable being, which presents no prospect to the impenitent and unregenerate, but one of hopeless anguish and despair. What, in such a case, becomes

* Rom. i. 18. † Rom. vii. 21.

of lifeless, formal, mechanical, and self-sufficient addresses to God; when the soul, feeling itself to be treading on the very surface of perdition, exclaims, "Lord, save me, I perish?" In fine, when we reflect upon the description given of Him who is the sole object of prayer, "that evil shall not stand in his sight, that he hates all the workers of iniquity,"* and combine with this view of his character his explicit announcement, that he "will fill the hungry with good things, and send the rich empty away,"† shall we still need to be assured that a deep consciousness of our own necessities is essential to acceptable prayer?

2. A belief that God is both able and willing to supply our necessities, if we diligently seek him, forms a requisite for the exercise of acceptable devotion. In the gross ignorance in which men are for the most part content to abide, they

* Psalm v. 5. † Luke i. 53.

are prone to fancy that the Most High needs somewhat from them, and that if they present to him a few occasional, cold, and heartless services, he must of necessity conceive himself to be greatly honoured by them. Did they employ the sagacity on this subject by which multitudes are distinguished in conducting the ordinary business of life, they would soon become sensible of the egregious absurdity and intolerable arrogance of such imaginations. These are, however, suffered to dwell within them, not indeed as sentiments to be universally expressed or publicly avowed, but as the secret palliatives of a disease, of whose presence they are not wholly unconscious, but with which they tamper till the season of effectual cure is for ever passed away. Just conceptions of the character of God, and the relations in which men stand to him, as their Creator and Sovereign, would banish from their minds all such injurious and unhallowed notions, and bring them to a

becoming sentiment of their obligations to love him supremely, and to regulate all their principles of thought and conduct by a regard to his will.

(1.) That God is able to supply every want by which men can be affected is so immediate a consequence of his omnipotence and all-sufficiency, as to render, in a great degree superfluous, any particular proof of it. The sacred volume abounds with the most magnificent descriptions of Divine power, expressed with transcendent sublimity, and immediately connected with the design of inducing men to repose their hopes on him. — "Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall; but they that

wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."* No possible kind of want can be experienced which transcends the capacity of Divine power to relieve.

(2.) An account somewhat more detailed and particular is requisite, in considering the willingness of God to relieve the necessities, which can never exceed the fulness of his power and sufficiency. This is rendered necessary by the consideration that when men are first awakened to just conceptions of their own insufficiency, and of the surpassing majesty and sufficiency of God, they are prone to question his willingness to succour them, and to indulge in imaginations, that the reason why their every want is not supplied is to be found in the reluctance of God to impart to them the rich abundance

* Isa. xl. 28—31.

of his power and blessing. Were the great Author of their being but as ready, they imagine, to communicate his favours as they are anxious and solicitous to share in them, every want would be at once supplied, and every complaint removed. We shall presently see that this is a groundless imagination, which has its origin in an imperfect acquaintance with the benignity of the Most High, and is supported by delusive conceptions of their own state of mind and feeling.

Nothing would be easier than to fill many pages with an account of the reasons which we have for drawing a conclusion directly the reverse of that which has been just noticed; and of showing that we are not straitened in God, but that we are straitened by our own unbelief, impatience, and want of submission to what are not unfrequently the inscrutable determinations of his providence and grace. I shall, however, restrict myself chiefly to one class of the arguments which evince

that God is, in reality, far more ready to impart than we are to receive the inestimable riches of his bounty. The proof of this to which I refer is in itself, indeed, but one, yet it is so comprehensive as to include every other, and so express as to authorise no doubt. I shall avail myself of the words of inspired wisdom to announce this proof. "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life."* The conclusion which inevitably follows is in the words of another heavenly messenger. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"† The first and most immediate thought which these sayings present is, that God has given to us the surest pledge of his willingness to save to the uttermost, which it was in the compass of

* John iii. 16. † Rom. viii. 32.

his unsearchable love to impart. Is it thought that this statement is too wide? or that it is placing a limitation on that which is illimitable? I write advisedly, with entire reverence for the infinite perfection of the Being of whom I speak, that the statement that almighty love has no greater proof to give of willingness to save, is altogether free from every degree of hyperbolical exaggeration. It is strictly and literally true. The gift that was bestowed is the gift of himself. The divine Saviour clothed himself in mortal array, he wore the semblance and reality of human infirmity, he subjected himself to the death of the cross, "he was crucified through weakness,"* yet while he appeared in the form of a servant, his glory was but veiled from human perception, he was still the same he had ever been, from everlasting, essentially and eternally God.

* 2 Cor. xiii. 4.

What the distinction is betweeen the Father who gave the Son, and the Son who was given, while it is unequivocally and in express terms asserted by the holy Scriptures, is left altogether unexplained; nor indeed is there a single word contained in the sacred volume, which may justly be looked upon as a basis on which any attempts to elucidate it may be placed. The more intelligent and wiser writers upon theological subjects appear now to concur in judging, that no explanation can be given of this profound and mysterious article of the christian belief. Every effort that has been made for the purpose of bringing it within the comprehension of our minds has failed, and there is reason to hope that no further endeavours will be made by sober and well-informed men to remove the veil which has evidently been thrown around it with design.

The Scriptures place before us the following facts in relation to this topic:—that the Father is possessed of every divine

perfection; that the Son is one with the Father; that God is one to the exclusion of every other; and that the Father sent the Son to redeem the world. They further state, that the Son took upon himself the nature of man, and that he effected human redemption by devoting himself to the death of the cross as a sacrifice of expiation. It is every way worthy of our deep consideration, that no reasonings are appealed to in the enunciation of these facts; no attempts are made to illuminate our ignorance, or to gratify our curiosity, by metaphysical or abstract arguments respecting their nature; nor any efforts used to remove the many speculative difficulties which are involved in them. Their truth rests solely on divine testimony, and on this ground must we place our faith, with an implicit subjection of our understandings to it. Any other procedure will expose us to the subtle and unsatisfying disputations of sceptical inquiry, or to the chimerical

and vagrant reveries of enthusiasm; and it will be well if we finally shun a relinquishment of the most essential articles of the christian profession.

We now return to our immediate subject of consideration, from which this short digression has been made. That subject is the truly stupendous proof which it has pleased the infinitely wise God to afford, by giving himself for man, that he is willing to bestow the greatest blessings upon those who diligently seek him. If this argument be thought insufficient, or unsatisfactory, we can proceed no further. Every other reason for believing the willingness of God to save us from all evil, falls unspeakably below this in force of evidence and persuasion. How powerfully and affectingly this argument may be put, we have a fine illustration in the words of the apostle: "When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure

for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."* Now it is the belief of this revealed fact, and of the consequence that immediately follows from it, which forms the most indispensable prerequisite for prayer. If this be wanting, all others will prove unavailing. There is no approach for sinful mortals to the throne of the Father, but through the mediation of the Son. "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. He that believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."† "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he hath consecrated for us, and having a high priest over the house of God: let us draw near with a

* Rom. v. 6—8. † John iii. 35, 36.

true heart, in full assurance of faith:"* *i. e.* with a full belief of the truth that God is willing to accept us, through the mediation of his Son, which he has appointed for this express purpose.

My inquiring and anxious readers will now permit me for a moment to direct their attention to this most interesting and engaging topic. You are aware that you have departed from the best and greatest of beings by your transgressions; that you are without power to make compensation for your violations of the laws of eternal and immutable rectitude; and that you are utterly destitute of strength to preserve yourselves from the inducements to evil which surround you on all sides, both from within and from without. What then will you do? How, you say, shall we approach the seat of inviolable purity and of unchangeable righteousness, to offer up our feeble but earnest

* Heb. x. 19—22.

aspirations for the mercy which alone can sustain and save us? Consider if any other reply can be made to such inquiries, after the statements that have been placed before you, but the original and invariable one which is provided by the Gospel, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Take with you to the Father this argument, — Thou hast not spared thy own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how wilt thou not with him also freely give us all things?" This is sufficient: and it is all-sufficient. Strenuously adhere to it, and shake off every apprehension, either that it is incomplete, or that there is any prohibition against your true and continued use of it.

As this is a theme of vital interest, I shall request attention to it a little longer. It is out of my power to describe with perfect fulness the difficulties that oppose what is apparently so simple and easy a process. A few of them, however, it

is necessary to specify, for the purpose of showing in what manner only they are all to be surmounted.

(1.) The first class of such difficulties arises from a variety of suggestions which fasten themselves on the thoughts of those who are desirous of approaching to God for mercy, respecting the multitude, the magnitude, the aggravations, or peculiar character of their past transgressions. Indescribable fears, darkness, and distress are wont oftentimes to accompany this state of the mind, and to inspire it with apprehensions, in some instances amounting nearly to utter despair, that every effort is vain, and that there is no reasonable hope of deliverance. What in such a case is to be done? Are you to aim at extenuating the guilt that cleaves to you? will you try to find out some reason why God should receive you, derived from your having been less defiled by iniquity than some other sinners? Will you advert to your freedom from out-

rageous and extraordinary crimes? or will you think of cleansing yourselves by tears, by ardent supplications, by works of mercy and charity, or by deeds of self-denial and mortification? No; none of these courses will succeed. Admit, then, the whole of the guiltiness which presses upon you; make no efforts to diminish its extent, aggravations, or peculiarity; place no reliance on foundations so insecure and tottering. Believe that the Son of God died for all; that his blood is the propitiation for every kind and degree of iniquity; that he invites you with outspread arms to come to him, and gives you his solemn reiterated assurances that he will in no wise cast you out. Consider the supreme dignity of his nature, the purposes of his death and resurrection, the inexpressible love and tenderness of his heart, displayed in all his conduct; remember his perfect truth, his solemn pledges, his living power, and cast far from you every other support of hope,

that you may cleave alone to him, and to the completeness of his salvation. Take this "shield of faith, wherewith you shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked."*

In bringing this section to a close, allow me to suggest a caution against the perplexities which entangle the minds of many, derived from the various and contradictory accounts that are given, as well by systematic writers, as by those who express the greatest contempt for systems, respecting the nature of faith. Let me urge you to recollect that the Scriptures were written for the use of the illiterate, as much as for that of the erudite; and that they would be unfit for the vast majority of those by whom they are most seriously perused, if the account which they give of so transcendently important an endowment, as faith is every where in them represented to be, were so refined,

* Ephes. vi. 16.

so subtile, or so profound, as that none but learned critics, philologists, or metaphysicians could with certainty ascertain its meaning. Alas! these, and others who have wished to be thought such, are the very persons by whom chiefly the perplexity has been created. Many of these are the persons who have fastened on the plain and intelligible accounts of revelation, the obscure, sophistical, and unintelligible glosses of superficial or profound, of fanatical or rational interpretation. Faith is a plain term: it is as well understood, probably, as any word in the English language. Every one knows what is meant by believing a credible declaration or testimony. Well, the declaration about which we are concerned is a declaration of God, delivered by Jesus Christ and his Apostles respecting the salvation of sinful men. The declaration is, that God is able and willing to save you, if you are willing to be saved by him. This is the truth to be

believed. If any proof be required of the correctness of this representation, it may be found in one of the most affecting and persuasive passages that are contained in the inspired volume. "All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us—the Apostles—the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now, then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; (or, as is more clear,) he hath made him, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."* The conclusion to be drawn from these words is, that God is reconciled to man

* 2 Cor. v. 18, *ad fin.*

by Jesus Christ, and that he is willing, nay, that he beseeches us, to be reconciled to him, by believing in his power and willingness to save us, through the substitution of his Son for us. A belief of this truth is the instrument by which men are to be saved, and it is exclusively so. The chief fault that will be found with this account of faith is, that it is so easy, so intelligible a matter, that it cannot be supposed to be the true, vital, saving faith that is inseparably connected with salvation. It would be extremely difficult to enumerate all the definitions that have been given of this word, or to assign all the distinctions that have been attached to it. It is, however, matter of little concern, whether it be called historical faith, or faith of the head, or of the heart, or faith of reliance, or faith of assurance: to believe the declaration or testimony of God, delivered first by his Son, and then by his servants the Apostles, is the faith of the gospel which is able to save the soul.

(2.) The second class of difficulties that are frequently experienced by men, as opposing their belief of the declaration of the gospel, in application to their own case, arises from their conscious weakness. There probably never was a Christian that has not in the progress of his christian course, especially at its commencement, been beset with fears, originating in the consciousness of his own extreme infirmity and utter helplessness. His purposes often fail, his most fixed resolutions give way, in some instances or other, to the inducements to evil that encompass him; the ignorance and uncertainty in which he finds himself often placed, in relation to many important points of duty, all concur to excite apprehensions respecting the reality of his faith and the permanence of his piety. He aims at fighting the good fight, but is conscious of being so often foiled, that he is reduced to the borders of despair, and retains little expectation that he shall

finish his course with joy. He is deeply sensible that his faith, if it be genuine, must be productive of the various virtues and excellencies by which alone its purity can be established; but his progress is so slow, his attainments so inconsiderable, and his feelings so mutable and inconsistent, that he is tempted to conclude his faith to be spurious, and his entire profession to be vitiated by the blemishes which he discovers in himself. Sentiments of this nature are not unfrequently aggravated by the painful certainty which he derives from increased acquaintance with persons who think themselves real Christians, and wish to be thought so by others, but in whose conduct he beholds the undeniable proofs that they are the victims of groundless confidence, and the wretched dupes of self-delusion. He trembles lest such should prove to be his own condition, aware as he is, that his unassisted powers are not greater than theirs, and that if he be not sustained by

an energy superior to his own he shall undoubtedly fall into the same condemnation.

Is it now, it may be inquired, such a man's duty to relinquish his hope, and to sink under the pressure of his apprehensions? Or is he to endeavour to impose upon himself, by looking on such apprehensions as altogether needless and chimerical? Shall he take his salvation into his own hands, and bold in self-confident assurance, shall he console himself with the thoughts of his own virtues and his excellent intentions? Oh, no! he could not adopt such a course if he would, his acquaintance with himself forbids it. One only expedient then remains; as he believes in the message of the gospel, and confides his every hope of forgiveness to it, so let him credit the same testimony in relation to his guidance and support amidst all the fears and dangers of his way. Let him maintain, against all opposition, his belief that God is as willing

to preserve him from falling as he is able; and in this belief let him employ the weapons with which he is, or may be furnished, in order to maintain the combat to its close. The battle is no longer his—it is the Lord's. Wherefore "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."* "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: praying always with all prayer and

* Philip. ii. 12.

supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance."*

(3.) The last class of difficulties that stand in the way of the exercise of faith, to which I shall advert, are those which result from the intrusion of reason into subjects that are not cognizable by its powers.

My readers will neither expect nor desire an elaborate recital or discussion of this class of difficulties, as it would occupy more space than can be afforded, and divert us too far from the main subject of this volume. A brief notice of some of them will sufficiently answer the end that I have in view. The profound and sagacious Bishop Butler uses the following expressions in his Analogy, respecting the province of reason with regard to subjects of pure revelation: "It is shown that upon supposition of a divine revelation, the analogy of nature renders it

* Ephes. vi. 11—18.

beforehand highly credible, I think, probable, that many things in it must appear liable to great objections; and that we must be incompetent judges of it, to a great degree. This observation is, I think, unquestionably true, and of the very utmost importance: but it is urged, as I hope it will be understood, with great caution of not vilifying the faculty of reason, which is 'the candle of the Lord within us;'* though it can afford no light where it does not shine; nor judge, where it has no principles to judge upon."—(Page 428, 4th edit.) In accordance with the cautions that are here expressed, my intention is not, in any remarks that I may offer, to cast contempt upon that admirable faculty of our minds to which they relate; my object is to guard against its being permitted to assume an authority to which it is not entitled. With this preliminary observation I shall notice, first,

* Prov. xx. 27.

some of the difficulties that are often deeply felt respecting the truths which we are bound to believe on the authority of revelation, however opposed they may seem to be to the deductions of reason; and secondly, the way in which they are to be met by such persons as desire to approach to God with acceptable prayers. I shall first notice some of the difficulties to which reference has been made. These difficulties relate chiefly to several of the principal facts that are revealed in the Scriptures.

The Scriptures state, as facts, that there is in the divine nature a perfect and equal participation of every divine perfection between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit: that these are, in a manner which is unrevealed, and therefore unknown, the only one, true, and living God; though some of the acts that are attributed to them respectively, cannot be predicated indiscriminately of them. It is, for instance, affirmed, that the

Father sent the Son into the world to accomplish the work of human redemption, and it would be a palpably unscriptural phrase to say, that the Son sent the Father. This observation holds true in several other respects. It is asserted in express terms in the Scriptures as a fact, that the Son assumed human nature, and that by his death he made a full and perfect expiation of human guilt. Another fact disclosed by the Scriptures is, that the Son exercises in heaven the office of a mediator and intercessor, for all who come unto God by him. Other facts are set before us to be believed, such as that God imputes righteousness to men without works, that faith without works is the sole instrument of justification, that men are in so sinful and deteriorated a condition, that they must be regenerated by the agency of the Holy Spirit, before they can see the kingdom of God; these facts, and others of similar character, are distinctly and expressly affirmed by the

holy Scriptures. Reason is prone to inquire, how can these things be? They appear more or less to be at variance with the determinations of our understandings. I shall offer no opinion about the extent in which such things are apparently at disagreement with the conclusions of reason. Different men will think differently about this. My object is to observe that difficulties arising from such sources are often the causes of great perplexity to serious and thoughtful persons, and with others I have now nothing to do; and to remark upon them, that the existence of the facts is expressly asserted, while, as was before noticed, nothing whatever is said about the manner of their existence. Innumerable efforts have been made to clothe these facts with an appearance different from that in which the plain letter of revelation has presented them; criticism has employed its most strenuous exertions to remove them from their places in the inspired record; litera-

ture has put forth and exhausted her ample stores, to bend to some other meaning the stubborn language in which they are represented; and imagination has impoverished itself by devices to conceal, misrepresent, or destroy, what, notwithstanding this most formidable combination, continues as palpable, unyielding, and unmanageable as it was at the instant when it flowed from the pens of the sacred writers.

It must, then, be left to every inquirer to decide for himself, whether he will credit the asserted facts on the testimony of Scripture, or will withhold his assent from them, because they appear to be repugnant to his reason. The proper use of reason, in this case, is to inquire into the credibility of revelation, for which inquiry the most ample and satisfying provision has been made by modern writers of the highest eminence for literature, talent, and research; and when satisfaction on this subject has been attained,

to inquire further, if these facts are or are not stated in the record. It is utterly indefensible, on any principles of reason, to maintain that the Scriptures come from God, but that they contain assertions to which we cannot assent. Let it be remembered, that we are directed to credit the testimony, not on the evidence of reason, but on that of revelation. God is responsible for the truth, and man for the belief or disbelief which he exercises in it.

It was proposed, secondly, to notice the way in which difficulties of this kind are to be overcome, by those who desire to approach to God with acceptable prayer. The most important observation which can be suggested on this subject is, that the submission of our understandings to the infinite knowledge and wisdom of God is the only effectual method of surmounting difficulties derived from this source. We know, on the surest grounds, that there can be no real discrepancy

between revelation and reason, whatever appearances of this kind may seem to indicate. The perfection of God is too great to suffer us to imagine that he is the author of declarations which are at variance either with truth or reason; while we may be not less certain, that our own capacities are too limited, and our powers of intellect too contracted, to admit of a moment's hesitation in deciding upon their unfitness to estimate correctly all that exists, or is taking place throughout the universe of being. These are conclusions which lie at the very basis of all religion. "Let God be true, though every man be a liar,"* is a sentiment equally agreeable to revelation and to reason. To conceive the contrary is, in the highest degree, irrational, and to maintain it would too justly expose us to an accusation of speaking evil against God.

There is little room for doubting that

* Rom. iii. 4.

the manner of God's existence, and the reasons for his conduct towards men, are concealed from us with design, as we can scarcely suppose that a much greater degree of information might not have been communicated respecting them. We are therefore led to conclude, that the reason why the discovery was not made is, that it seemed fit to the divine wisdom to leave these subjects in partial obscurity, in order to ensure a probation equally applicable to our understandings and our hearts. Enough is disclosed for the performance of every duty, and the sincerity, uprightness, and submission of our minds to the will of God will be proved by the manner in which these difficulties and this partial concealment affect us. It was surely not without reason affirmed by our Lord and Saviour, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."* Let us then

* Matt. xviii. 3.

prostrate ourselves before the throne of the Most High, with profound reverence for the majesty, holiness, and wisdom of Him who sits thereon, with lowly sentiments of our own inexpressible ignorance and insufficiency, with a full assurance of the truth of his word, and finally with an unshaken reliance on his ability and willingness to enlighten our minds, to cleanse our hearts, and to convey us forwards to the fullest perfection and bliss of which our nature is susceptible.

3. Among the indispensable prerequisites of prayer, an earnest and permanent desire of obtaining the blessings which we need, in the way that God has appointed, was enumerated.

Separated from this qualification, prayer will be little, if at all, better than mere trifling, a service of the lips, a mockery of God. If the desire be not earnest, there can be no sincerity; if it be not permanent, it can assure no final benefit. It must spring from principles deeply rooted

in the soul, or it will be deficient in energy, and will give way under the inducements which are so multiform, and are ever offering themselves to oppose the steady and fixed discharge of the duty. Every example of prayer which the Scriptures have recorded is marked by deep earnestness, and the injunctions that are addressed to us on the subject are, that it must be perpetual, and to be relinquished only with our vital breath. "Pray without ceasing,"* is the apostolical precept. "That men ought always to pray, and not to faint,"† is the rule sanctioned by our Redeemer himself. In the more devotional parts of the sacred writings, expressions of the utmost ardency of spirit abound in the applications that are addressed to God for deliverance from evil, and for the attainment of his divine favour. The earnestness of the soul in its pursuit of spiritual endowments is compared to

* 1 Thess. v. 17. † Luke xviii. 1.

that of a merchant, who having discovered one pearl of great price, parts with his entire possessions in order to obtain it.

In the Book of Psalms, that rich treasury of devotion, we find numerous aspirations for God, and the enjoyment of his favour, expressed with a force significant of the strongest desire, where the royal worshipper, the pious author of most of those exquisite compositions, pours forth his whole nature, and the entire fervency of his strength, in his addresses to the living and everlasting object of his dearest hopes. "My soul longeth, yea even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God." "O God, thou art my God, early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee, in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary. Because thy loving kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee. Thus will I bless

thee while I live: I will lift up my hands in thy name. My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips: when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night-watches. Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice. My soul followeth hard after thee: thy right hand upholdeth me."* Let the superstitious babblers of reiterated forms, who measure the excellency and acceptableness of their services by their endless multiplication, learn from these specimens of devotion, authorized by the sanction of inspiration, to estimate their true value; and let the heartless devotees of ceremonious rites or pompous formalities discern the worthlessness of such offerings in the sight of that infinite Spirit, "who seeketh such to worship him, as worship in spirit and in truth."†

* Psal. lxiii. 1—8. † John iv. 23, 24.

In unison with earnestness and permanency of devotion must be combined the purpose of the soul to direct its approach to God by the way which he has himself appointed. I shall not repeat here what has been noticed respecting the establishment of a plan of mediation, carried on by the ministry of the Son of God, further than to observe, that this mediation is at once the source of the acceptance of prayer, and the all-comprehensive encouragement to unwearied perseverance in it. "Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life; nor can any man come unto the Father but by him."* To neglect or overlook this, is to insure the rejection of all our addresses. He alone is the High Priest of our profession, by whom the sacrifice of prayer can be offered, so as to meet with divine approbation. Last, though not least, let us not fail to imitate the distinguished apostle, who, when

* John xiv. 6.

avowing his affectionate regard for the Christians of Ephesus, pours forth his ardent entreaty, "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints." It is the Spirit of God that maketh "intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered."* The influence of this sacred Spirit is the comprehensive blessing which our Lord promised to his disciples; it is the source of all genuine devotion; the powerful cause of every christian grace and virtue; the witness of our adoption into the family of heaven, and the seal which, by its living impressions, marks out, and designates the heirs of the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and

* Rom. viii. 26.

Saviour Jesus Christ. That it may never be forgotten how amply and how freely this Spirit is imparted to those who seek it, allow me to terminate these remarks by placing before you the persuasive encouragement which the blessed Saviour offers to all without exception:—"If ye being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?"* And lest the good things here specified should be misconceived, let me cite the parallel passage in another evangelist:—"If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"†

II. It was observed at the commencement of this chapter, that there is a class of attainments which, though not of so indispensable a character as the prerequisites of

* Matt. vii. 11. † Luke xi. 13.

prayer that have been enumerated, are yet of very great importance. To these I beg now to direct the attention of my readers.

I shall adopt the following arrangement of the remarks which I have to offer upon these attainments: they consist of an increase of self-knowledge,—a more accurate and extensive understanding of the Scriptures,—a more intimate acquaintance with God,—and a constant aim to improve in every christian grace and virtue.

1. An increase of self-knowledge is an attainment exceedingly favourable to improvement in prayer.

Without some acquaintance with ourselves, it is impossible to pray at all in a manner that is acceptable to God. In the absence of this species of knowledge we shall be strangers to our necessities, which ought to form the subjects of our petitions, and altogether unfit for the exercise of those dispositions and sentiments of the heart which are essential to the right performance of this most

important duty. At the outset of the christian course, the feelings are often greatly excited; the amazing importance of the possession of unfeigned piety, associated as it is with everlasting happiness, and the fearful consequences of that state of alienation from God in which those persons are found who are destitute of piety, act with extreme force upon the passions, so that there is little room left for the sober exercise of judgment, but the soul rapidly passes through various alternations of fear and hope. As soon as hope acquires an ascendency, which it ever does, more or less, in all cases of real piety, so much delight is frequently experienced, that a supposition of the victory being gained is apt to spring up, until further experience teaches but too painfully that the combat is only begun. Deep depression not seldom succeeds this discovery, and, as in the former state of hope, something allied to presumption takes place, so in the latter, despondency

spreads its louring clouds over the spirit. External inducements to evil which were unforeseen come powerfully into action, and internal weaknesses and sinful propensities, which were not before suspected, concur but too readily with them. By such a course the early acquisition of some degree of self-acquaintance is made. Unhappily, when this process of mental and spiritual improvement has acquired some portion of solidity, the feelings are prone to become torpid and the passions lifeless, so that it is matter of frequent observation, that as knowledge increases, fervency of spirit diminishes. In this case, the Christian too easily acquiesces in his present advancement, rests in the attainments that have been made, and pursues his course with a degree of apathy and unconcern which is inconsistent with any extended improvement. The exercise of prayer, which had formerly engaged his affections so warmly, loses a great part of its interest, and life is not unfrequently

passed away without any strenuous efforts for a better state of things.

It is scarcely necessary to observe, that a frequent and attentive contemplation of the state of the heart and of the understanding, aided by a comparison with the scriptural descriptions of genuine religion, would do much to counteract those baneful effects which are so natural to sinful men. A comprehensive conception of the extent of divine requirements, of the hinderances to improvement which arise from secular associations, and pursuits acting upon the predominant affections and passions of the heart, a frequent investigation of the prevailing motives of conduct, and a jealous scrutiny into the entire condition of the soul, would supply abundant means and motives for an amended exercise of devotion, and ascertain, beyond all doubt, that self-knowledge is pregnant with powerful auxiliaries to the practice of fervent and stedfast prayer.

2. A more accurate and extensive

understanding of the holy Scriptures is an attainment very conducive to the promotion of the proper exercise of prayer.

The holy Scriptures are written with great plainness in whatever relates to the essential parts of religion. Nothing is wanted to render the readers of them well-informed upon the most interesting subjects but a sincere desire of instruction, combined with reasonable industry and common intelligence. Numerous cases are on record in which men, with few or no additional aids, have acquired a very competent acquaintance with the contents of the sacred pages. The most necessary requisite for this purpose is a real wish for improvement, joined with the design of reducing to practice the information that is obtained. If men trifle with the book of God, if they read it with an indolent temper, satisfied with the perusal of it as a necessary, though an irksome task, or if the study of it be undertaken for an acquaintance with its contents, merely

speculative, without the design of applying the knowledge acquired to appropriate uses; or if this be done for purposes of ostentation, or the gratification of literary vanity; it is not wonderful that grievous mistakes should be the consequence of such abuse. Again, if men sit down to the perusal of this divine book with preconceived opinions, which they wish to fortify, instead of submitting to receive the instruction that is deducible from it, wherever it may lead them,—much more if they read it with captious designs, seeking for reasons to justify their scepticism, or to strengthen their dislike to it,—the results may without difficulty be predicted: "for the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."*

* Heb. iv. 12.

The temper with which upright men peruse the Bible prompts them to implore Divine aid, that their prejudices may be subdued, their understandings enlightened, and their hearts made better by it. Hence we find such sentiments as these expressed—"Open thou my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law."* "Lead me in thy truth, and teach me."† No instances, we may be well persuaded, will be found in which the Scriptures have thus been read, without the attainment of the desired end. Men whose education has not imparted to them much literary information, but who are actuated by a sincere desire to obtain an extensive acquaintance with the Scriptures, are happily, in this age and country, surrounded by ample means for making the attainment. Reasonable men cannot, but with regret and surprise, witness the perverseness which is not

* Ps. cxix. 18. † Ps. xxv. 5.

unfrequently seen in some persons, who, having access to such aids for improvement, weakly and childishly refuse to employ them, from an ill-understood notion that the Bible is itself sufficient for all the purposes of religion, and that other books are injurious, rather than serviceable, to the proper interpretation of it. Such readers of the Scriptures are little aware of the obligations under which they are placed to other books, and unconscious of what is palpably true, that if all other men had resembled themselves, they would have enjoyed no opportunity of reading what they profess to value so highly; and, most probably, would have been ignorant of the existence of such a volume.

It is entirely needless, and would imply a degree of presumption in me, to urge those more favoured individuals, who are richly endowed with stores of literature and science, to employ them for their own instruction, or for the improvement of

others, as it is matter of the highest satisfaction to know that the present times are adorned by a host of illustrious scholars, who look upon the elucidation of the holy Scriptures as the noblest object to which they can dedicate their varied talents and acquirements. But that I may not digress from my immediate object, I would observe, that an accurate knowledge of the contents and meaning of the sacred volume cannot fail to contribute greatly to the uses of prayer, when it is sought with reference to this purpose. Innumerable mistakes will be rectified; unfounded fears and apprehensions, often resulting from misconception of the sense of the Scriptures, will be dissipated; and a full and satisfying assurance of knowing the truth will take possession of the mind, so as to render it strong in the retention of its invaluable benefits, and ready on all suitable occasions to maintain it, against the ignorant, the impious, or the infidel objections that may be made against it;

and especially to eradicate those seeds of pride, presumption, and vain speculation, that are sown deeply in our bosoms, and are ever ready to spring forth, to the very termination of life. The daily reading of the Scriptures, with such a disposition as has been indicated, will not fail to furnish abundant subjects for prayer, or to stimulate to the fervent and persevering employment of it.

3. A more intimate acquaintance with God will impart aid of the most beneficial nature to the practice of prayer.

The knowledge of God is the substantial and immoveable basis of all true religion. In his great goodness to us he has furnished us with the amplest means for the attainment and increase of it. The face of nature reflects his glory; the heavens and the earth alike bear witness to his existence, perfection, and providence; the volume of inspiration imparts the most pure, elevated, and sublime notions of his nature, character, and intentions.

Nevertheless, our own nature is so imperfect, our faculties of intelligence so limited, and the sinful prepossessions of our hearts are so numerous, that we are subject oftentimes to inexpressible perplexities upon this most interesting of all themes. The very excellency and perfection of the Most High become often a source of difficulty, from our inability to combine satisfactorily the exercise of one divine attribute with another. The light in which the Deity dwells dazzles our feeble intellect, and confounds our most acute perceptions. We oftentimes know not how to harmonize his immutable decrees with the responsibility of created nature; we are at a loss to render consistent with our notions, his secret purposes and his revealed will. We are liable to stumble at the courses of his all-comprehending providence, and to experience surprise and disappointment at the events which he permits to take place. The accounts which he has been pleased

to give us in the Scriptures of his nature, and of the arrangements of his moral and spiritual government, are, in not a few instances, so different from our previous conceptions, as to fill us with a degree of astonishment bordering on incredulity. We are sometimes afflicted for reasons which we are unable to assign, and the whole existence and destiny of mankind sometimes wear the semblance of an enigma, which we are entirely unable to resolve.

How much of hinderance to the practice of fervent and unremitting devotion such a state of things contributes, it is not easy to say; that, in many instances, it acts injuriously and painfully is too evident to be questioned. No alleviation of these evils can be derived from any other sources than enlarged conceptions of God's unsearchable wisdom and infinite love. We shall abide untractable, proud, and high-minded, until we have learned that submission of understanding and heart to him is not merely our duty, but that it

is in itself most reasonable, and will be productive of the happiest effects. Frequent intercourse with the Father of our spirits will, as has been before shown, exert a purifying and salutary influence on our minds; while the improvement of our knowledge of him, of his gospel, and of his promises, will render us better fitted to maintain that intercourse. An experience of his mercy, in supporting, strengthening, consoling, and sanctifying us, will lead us to the footstool of his throne with inexpressible joy and satisfaction; and we shall be ready to say to others, as he says to us, "O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him."*

4. A constant aim to improve in every christian grace and virtue will afford especial assistance to improvement in the exercise of prayer.

The several attainments that have now

* Ps. xxxiv. 8.

been enumerated are, as will be seen, very closely connected one with another, so that, in describing one, it is difficult to avoid saying something that, perhaps, more properly belongs to another article; they must, therefore, be taken together, when their mutual relations will form them into a whole, which will bear most forcibly on the attention. It has been either expressly stated, or implied in the immediately preceding remarks, that such qualities as submission to the infinite wisdom of God, attention to his word, patience under the afflictive visitations of his providence, and a general impression of his supreme excellence, afford, respectively, great assistance in the performance of prayer. But these are each of them christian virtues; and if to them we add an improvement of faith, the cultivation of a lowly and docile temper, an increased dependence upon the divine Redeemer, and a more stedfast pursuit of the enlightening and purifying grace of the

Holy Spirit, we shall combine the most powerful means which religion provides for our growth and increase in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; and we shall find our reward in an increased enjoyment of the purest pleasures of devotion, and an augmented capacity and fitness for discharging its duties; "giving" then, "all diligence, add to your faith, virtue, (*i. e.* manly courage); and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity, (*i. e.* love; *vide* 1 Cor. xiii.); for if these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." *

* 2 Pet. i. 5—8.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE PARTS AND OBJECTS OF PUBLIC AND SOCIAL DEVOTION.

It has been already remarked that the word prayer is used sometimes, in a restricted sense, to mean petition or supplication; but that in a larger and more comprehensive acceptation, it is employed to signify all the several parts of the exercises of devotion. So much has been said in the preceding chapters respecting the nature and duty of prayer, in its most confined signification, that little more is requisite to be noticed on that subject. We shall now proceed to take a view,

first, of the several parts of prayer, when the term is used in its most comprehensive meaning, inclusive of every exercise of devotion; and, secondly, of the various objects to which public and social devotion is to be directed.

I. We are to consider the several parts of which the exercises of public and social devotion consist. These may be ranged under the heads of adoration, — humiliation,—confession, — self-renunciation, — expressions of dependence on God, — thanksgiving and praise, — and intercession.

This arrangement does not imply that the several parts of it should, in practice, invariably succeed each other in the order that is here set down. It may be proper sometimes to adopt a different course of succession, and to distribute the several parts under a different arrangement. This distribution must be left to the discretion of the ministers, or other persons whose business it is to preside over devotional

assemblies; and should be regulated by a regard to the time that is allotted to each service, and to the peculiar circumstances of each case. The order that is here suggested is, perhaps, generally speaking, the most natural and appropriate, and on this account I shall follow it in the remarks which I have to offer on each of these several parts. We cannot advantageously blend all these topics together, without any distribution, as this would produce a very confused account of them; nor can the actual exercise of devotion be conducted in the most useful and agreeable manner without some attention to an orderly arrangement of its parts.

1. Adoration. On examining the scriptural models of devotion we find great regard paid to this part of it. It implies a recital of the Divine perfections, accompanied by such a review of them, as is adapted, in the most direct manner, to promote such sentiments and feelings of heart as impart to devotion its greatest

value. No exercise of thought is so effectual to excite an active and vigorous state of mind, as an enlarged contemplation of the transcendant excellencies of the Divine nature and character, those surpassing glories by which the Most High is encompassed, and in which he dwells from age to age. We are exceedingly liable, through our association with secular and temporal interests, to overlook the greatness of the Being whose worshippers we professedly are. Earthly affections cloud our spirits, and interpose a veil between them and the objects on which they should be supremely fixed. It is with great difficulty that our belief of the existence of spiritual realities is sustained among the many sensible objects that are incessantly pressing on our attention. The effect of the feeble hold that our faith takes of invisible things, is to beget cold and fluctuating affections towards them; and thus the energies of the soul are transferred to inferior pursuits, and so fastened upon

them, as to unfit us, in a great degree, for holding converse with that Being, whom we can apprehend only by the exercise of faith. What then can so be adapted to prepare us for engaging in his immediate service, as taking a comprehensive review of His excellencies, in whose presence we place ourselves, and to whom we design to offer the homage of our souls? We thus draw away our thoughts from all visible scenes, and fix them on what is unseen. We bring near to our apprehensions the immense, eternal, and only wise God, "in whom we live, and move, and have our being;" we impress upon our hearts the consciousness of his presence, while we say, "O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me; thou knowest my down-sitting and my up-rising; thou understandest my thought afar off; thou compassest my path, and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but lo! O Lord, thou knowest

it altogether. Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there; if I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me."

When we thus look up to God, we feel the utter worthlessness and vileness of every other pursuit, compared with that of the enjoyment of His favour, whom we adore as the fountain of life, the source of light, the inexhaustible ocean of blessedness and felicity. While we express, in the accents of adoring seraphs, the spotless purity of the Most High, and exclaim, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is filled with his glory;" we sink down under the consciousness of our own impurity, and we say, "Behold, we are vile; we abhor ourselves, and repent in dust and ashes;" we then

take our proper place, and feel that, in comparison with Him who fills heaven and earth with his presence, we are altogether nothing and vanity. By such means the sentiments of those who conduct the worship are raised, and the elevation is communicated to those who follow, until one feeling pervades the assembly, and the whole multitude adore Him who liveth for ever and ever; and thus the fervid ascriptions of heaven are, in some measure, imitated on earth—"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing: blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever."* When we consider that the exercise of adoration is adapted to promote such effects, we can scarcely avoid to feel regret that it is sometimes passed over

* Rev. v. 12, 13.

with transient notice, and is not permitted to have its full share in the devotion which is offered to the great object of christian worship.

2. Humiliation. This exercise of devotion is so closely united with that of adoration, that it is scarcely possible to engage in the latter without being almost imperceptibly led to an adoption of the former. Affecting representations of the glory of God can hardly fail to be followed, in minds of any habitual piety, by a becoming consciousness of our inexpressible inferiority and nothingness. In presenting acts of adoration to God, we are reminded of his existence from everlasting to everlasting; of his being the author of all nature; the only Sovereign of the universe: that he is the source of all that is good and excellent, in the physical, the moral, and spiritual worlds: our minds are fixed on him, as comprehending within himself whatever is fair, or beauteous, or lovely, in reality and in conception; and

we feel, at once, that we have nothing of our own; that our corporeal frame is the product of his power, our mental faculties the endowments of his goodness: we are impressed with the certainty that we owe to him our love, our utmost duty and service; and that, after all, we are unprofitable servants, who can contribute nothing to his glory, his unchangeable majesty, or his infinite felicity.

In addition to these, which are the almost necessary consequences of adoration, it is an essential part of the worship that is acceptable to God, to make this humiliation of ourselves before him the express purpose of our souls. It is our duty to employ the most strenuous efforts to effect it, and to feel that our services are most deficient and incomplete without it. Hence it should be perpetually kept in view; its propriety and fitness contrasted with the folly and arrogance that are implied in all high thoughts of ourselves, or our faculties, or our attainments,

till we learn habitually to know the place that belongs to us, and to occupy it with all becoming promptitude and readiness of mind.

3. Confession. "God be merciful to me a sinner" are words expressive of a prayer which we have the authority of our blessed Saviour for believing to be acceptable, and, taken in connexion with many other portions of Scripture, assure us that the confession of sin is an essential part of the exercise of devotion. In the private exercises of prayer, to which God is alone privy, confession should be extended to a particular enumeration of the sins which an acquaintance with ourselves brings to our remembrance; and it would certainly imply a want of sincerity if we failed to acknowledge, with an ingenuous and candid temper, any of the transgressions which an examination of the heart and conduct brings to light. These, with all their peculiar aggravations, must be spread before God, who requires

this exercise of duty, not because he needs the information to be derived from it, but that we may be brought to such a lowly sense of our guiltiness as will lead us earnestly to pray for forgiveness, and to seek for the remission of our offences by a renunciation of all which we may have fancied to be our righteousness, by a deep sensibility of the impossibility of justifying ourselves, and by an entire reliance upon the righteousness of God which is revealed in the gospel.

But the case differs, in some important respects, when we consider the duty of confession in reference to public and social exercises of devotion. As the person to whom is committed the responsible office of speaking in the names of others can be conscious only of his own deviations from the path of rectitude, and can possess only a general knowledge of the real characters and actions of those whom he represents, so must his acknowledgments of sin be general. Even in instances in

which he may be aware of the particular transgressions of some of the persons whom he represents, it forms no part of his duty to advert to them. This would be a flagrant abuse of the trust that is reposed in him; an offence of no small magnitude against the assembly over which he presides; a cause of very justifiable displeasure to those whose conduct would thus be animadverted upon; and it would turn into an instrument of censoriousness and an engine of extreme mischief an appointment that is made solely for the purposes of edification and general improvement.

No excuse can be pleaded for any man who renders his prayers a vehicle for evil speaking, or for the publication of any thing that may prove injurious to the feelings or characters of those who unite with him in the exercise of devotion. It is indeed scarcely possible to imagine a practice which is more indecorous in itself, or more at variance with the serious awe

by which every address to the Most High should be regulated.

No restraint is, however, placed on general confessions of guiltiness, let the sentiments of which they may be expressive be ever so deep, and the language in which they may be conveyed ever so pungent. Confession is to be extended to an acknowledgment that all have grievously offended; that all are heavily laden with iniquity, and have come short, in every instance, of the glory of God; so that "there is none righteous, no, not one." The object of the leader of the worship should be, to feel deeply his own guiltiness, and to communicate a similar feeling to those whom he personates. By this course the improvement of all will be promoted, and the important design of this part of public and social worship will be attained. In order to the due discharge of this part of the worship of God, ministers and other persons, who may be frequently engaged in representing their

fellow-worshippers, should be persons distinguished by a competent acquaintance with themselves. They must not be novices. They should be deeply sensible of the magnitude and evil nature of iniquity. Aware of the extreme weakness and corrupted condition of the souls of men, they should stand aloof from whatever might pamper vanity, and from all that partakes of self-confidence, of boasting, or of a wish to exalt themselves by covert insinuations of the extent of their attainments, the depth of their humility, or the fervour of their piety. Such persons ought to be discreet, experienced, and moderate, that their services may be free from manifest improprieties, and conducted in a manner becoming the homage which feeble and most imperfect mortals tender to the God of heaven and earth.

4. Self-renunciation. Every duty which it is incumbent on men to perform is connected in various ways with the exercise of devotion. No means so effectual

can be devised for bringing the truths of religion to act powerfully on the heart as making them the subjects of earnest supplication. By this means, their extent and obligation are more fully and distinctly apprehended, and the soul becomes more deeply pledged to govern itself in agreement with those views which it entertains, while it is occupied in converse with God. In no instance do these remarks hold more true than in relation to the duty of self-renunciation: a duty of great extent, and against the practice of which numerous impediments are often found to be opposed. The duty itself is most emphatically stated in many parts of the Scriptures, and represented as inferior in importance to no other. "Thus saith the Lord, Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord."* "Thus saith the Lord, Let not

* Jer. xvii. 5.

the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord."* In what manner these injunctions are to be understood and brought into use, we shall perceive by a reference to the actual practice of those who are best fitted to deliver instruction respecting them. "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having my own righteousness which is of the law, but

* Jer. ix. 23, 24.

that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: that I may know him."* The same inspired writer, after a most vivid representation of the conduct of God towards mankind, expresses in the following terms the purpose by which that conduct is dictated:—"That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."†

Such are the scriptural grounds on which the duty of self-renunciation rests: and it is our present purpose to consider the exercise of it in the actual engagement of prayer. Every intelligent worshipper of God, then, prays for wisdom to direct his course, for strength to sustain him in the performance of duty, and the

* Philip. iii. 7—10. † 1 Cor. i. 29, *ad fin.*

endurance of trial. He prays for the forgiveness of his unnumbered transgressions, and for righteousness to justify him from all the accusations which the holy laws of God prefer against him. The offering of such petitions is a virtual exercise of self-renunciation. They imply, that the petitioner, in seeking to God for such gifts of his gracious favour, places no reliance upon his own wisdom, or strength, or righteousness; but altogether abandons them as insufficient for his relief and safety. A more explicit discharge of this duty, however, is demanded in the exercise of prayer: nor is it difficult to be performed when men clearly discern their actual circumstances. Little persuasion is needed to induce a shivering wretch, whose worn and tattered garments are unable to defend him from the cold or to conceal his nakedness, to cast them away, if by so doing he may become the possessor of warm, complete, and elegant clothing. So neither will the conscious,

defenceless, and undone transgressors of Divine laws long hesitate to renounce all dependence on themselves, when they clearly perceive that durable riches and righteousness are to be acquired by humble requests for them. A drowning mortal, who catches at every straw that comes within his reach, will eagerly relinquish his hold of such ineffectual supports, if he perceives that he may thus secure a landing upon sure and substantial ground; so, unquestionably, will the man who feels his utmost strength to be abject weakness, quit his dependence upon it, when he discovers the hand of Omnipotence stretched out to support and uphold him.

It may be requisite to employ a moment's space to correct mistakes that are sometimes made on the subject which now engages our attention. The nature of due self-renunciation is not seldom misconceived by some sincere, though, in this instance, ill-informed Christians,

whose errors are also maintained by some persons who either entertain false notions of the nature of true religion, or who wish to injure its character by calumnious misrepresentations. This duty is, in some cases, represented as though it implied, in a relinquishment of dependence on ourselves, the abandonment of all those means of personal improvement, to the use of which we find so many forcible exhortations in the sacred writings. For the proper mode of removing such injurious apprehensions, I shall beg to refer my readers to the remarks that have before been submitted to them, when we were considering the objections that are made against the reasonableness and utility of prayer. The principles which were then stated are entirely applicable to the present topic, and sufficiently show that the most entire renunciation of self-dependence is in perfect agreement with the vigorous use of all the appointed means of security and safety. Let us

now advance to another constituent of devotion, which is immediately related to that of self-renunciation.

5. Expressions of dependence on God. The singular excellency of the gospel arises from its clear and explicit annunciation of the willingness of God to respond to the applications and dependence of men. Reason can deduce from the works of God a very sufficient discovery of his power to relieve human necessities; but it has no means of determining whether he will extend mercy and forgiveness to the transgressors of his laws. For the assurances which we possess on this transcendent topic, we are indebted solely and exclusively to revelation. The argument which the gospel employs to demonstrate the certainty of its assurances on this subject, is, as has been before shown, the most effective which even Divine sufficiency could impart. Christians, therefore, who approach to God by "the new and living way" which he has appointed,

are authorized to draw the triumphant conclusion, that all things are theirs: "Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; — and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's."*

When these considerations are duly weighed, we shall clearly perceive the reasons why expressions of dependence upon God form an essential part of the exercise of devotion. We can appropriate to ourselves the mercies of God only by committing ourselves to them. As we are perfectly aware that we have no ground of dependence in ourselves, we renounce it; and it is, as we have just seen, an appropriate exercise of devotion to express such renunciation; so it is equally appropriate to express to the divine Author of our hopes the dependence which we have transferred from ourselves to him. Such

* 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23.

expressions of faith and reliance are most direct means of giving to him the glory that is due to him; and of proclaiming our solemn purposes to glory in nothing, nor to place any dependence on any thing that is inferior to himself. No exercise of mind is more congenial with the ends of devotion than this, nor any that is likely to excite in our bosoms more reviving and refreshing sentiments: "One shall say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel."*

6. Thanksgiving and praise. This, so delightful and gratifying an exercise of devotion, is intimately connected with the expressions of faith and dependence which we have just noticed; it springs immediately out of them, and imparts to them as much of the completeness and per-

* Isa. xliv. 5.

fection of devotion as the present state is susceptible of. It is, indeed, the commencement of that bliss and glory, the consummation of which will, ere long, "wipe away all tears from all eyes." The reasons for praise and thanksgiving are coextensive with the instances of Divine beneficence and bounty which we experience: of these we may truly say, that, like "the sands upon the sea shore," they are innumerable. These blessings flow from the infinite perfection and all-sufficiency of the Divine nature; so that every gift which we receive should be traced up to these sources, that our praises may be mingled with adoration, and not confined within the narrow limits of a regard to ourselves, and our own happiness. It is very possible for men who have little or no real religion to be penetrated, on some occasions, with grateful sentiments for the favours which they experience at the hands of God; on this account the mere feeling of gratitude is

an extremely equivocal proof of the sincerity and genuineness of devotion. A truly religious gratitude rises above considerations merely personal, and regards the benefits that have been received as occasions for calling nobler sentiments into action. To offer sincere praises to God, arising from deep impressions of his unrivalled excellency, and from holy affections terminating in him, as the centre of all moral and spiritual excellency, imparts an unequivocal proof of genuine piety, and is unquestionably to be ranked among the highest expressions of devotion which it is in our power to offer.

Neither our faculties, nor the time allotted to public or social devotion, admit a complete enumeration of the favours that we have derived from the loving-kindness and tender mercies of God; and on this account, a selection must be made of such instances as are most comprehensive, or, because of their fresh occurrence, are most likely to act

powerfully on our feelings. It should ever be in our remembrance, that general indiscriminate expressions of thankfulness are liable to be passed over with transient effect, and to be deficient in stimulating our best and purest feelings; and that, therefore, such a selection of the reasons for praise should be made by those who lead the worship, as is best fitted for this purpose. A wide field opens to our view whenever we advert to the favours and mercies that we have received from God, and which are incessantly flowing, in full streams of bounty and beneficence, towards us. Our creation, and continued preservation; the inestimable endowments of understanding and memory; the innumerable objects in the heavens, and on the earth, that surround us, adapted to act upon our faculties, and to excite emotions of the most admiring and pleasurable kind; our friends; our freedom; our capacities of endless improvement in knowledge and happiness; in short, what-

ever constitutes our corporeal and mental being, furnishes an immense variety from which a selection of topics for praise and thanksgiving may be taken. We shall then advert to the stupendous theme of redemption, and the recovery of fallen man; the amazing gift of a Divine and Almighty Saviour; the rich and ample communications of the Holy Spirit; the record of God's nature, providence, and will, contained in the sacred writings; the numberless deliverances from dangerous and trying difficulties that we have experienced; the communion of Christians; the promises of safe conduct amidst the weakness, darkness, and evil propensities of our hearts; the assurances that God's kingdom will finally triumph over all opposition; and the blessed hopes of "an inheritance, incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away." These all conspire to suggest to our thoughts themes for praise, and gratitude, and endless adoration.

7. Intercession. By intercession is intended the exercise of supplication for the welfare and happiness of our friends, our countrymen, our fellow-Christians, and for all mankind, without excluding even our enemies. All these several descriptions of men are related to us, and we are bound to make their improvement and well-being the objects of assiduous and unremitting devotion. "I exhort therefore that supplications, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." *

The reasons on which this duty is founded are many, and of great weight. As men it becomes us to feel an interest

* 1 Tim. ii. 1—4.

in whatever relates to mankind. Our utmost exertions are indeed unable to communicate extensive benefits to the world at large; but while we are expected to discharge the offices of benevolence, friendship, and charity, in our narrow sphere, towards those who are most nearly related to us, we are by no means at liberty to think that we may feel indifferent to the public welfare. As far as the necessary occasions of life permit, we should make ourselves acquainted with the circumstances of mankind generally, that we may have definite objects for our intercession; and may, by a consideration of them, be excited to express, in the only way we can, our good wishes towards them. We shall manifest great inattention to the courses of God's providence and grace if we suffer ourselves to suppose that supplications, on so extended a scale for others, are productive of no useful purposes. God has enjoined this duty upon us, and assured us, that "the

fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."* No exertion of benevolence is more becoming, none that is more truly dignified or ornamental, than that by which, in habitually pleading for their fellow-men, Christians assume the office of mediators, and intercede for millions who are themselves regardless of all that constitutes their highest interests.

The steady and continued exercise of this duty will be productive of a most benign influence upon our own hearts and feelings. We shall thus bring ourselves, most forcibly, to perceive the obligation of relative duties; as it is impossible to pray sincerely and earnestly for others, while we are indifferent to their welfare, or disposed in any way to diminish their happiness, by those means of selfishness, injustice, and oppression, that aim only at self-aggrandizement, without regard to the sufferings and

* James v. 16.

misery which may be inflicted on others. A reason will thus be brought into constant exercise for a close investigation of our principles, and motives of action, which cannot fail to have a salutary effect both on ourselves and on society at large. It will incline us to seek the peace of those private circles in which we more immediately move, and the prosperity of the large public community to which we belong. We are in reality deeply interested in the public welfare, since, if that be interrupted, we shall individually, in our persons and interests, and in those of our families and friends, feel its injurious effects. True patriotism consists, first, in the discharge of private virtue, and extends itself gradually over all that interests our country and the human race. Real Christians are the best friends of public order, and the surest guardians of the frame of society.

It must not be forgotten that the increase and prosperity of the christian

church at large forms one of the most important parts of the duty of intercession. We are naturally led to take the deepest interest in that community of Christians to which we ourselves are, from conviction and choice, attached; but that bosom must be a stranger to the expansive philanthropy of the gospel, all the views, exertions, and prayers of which are confined within the limits of any single community of the disciples of Christ. "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ," is a christian prayer, and worthy of universal adoption. We shall act little upon the principles of "the charity that covereth* all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, and endureth all things," if we suffer the sentiments of our hearts to be so restrained by the minor distinctions of party, as to lose all genuine feeling for the universal body of the christian profession. "Pray for the peace

* Στέγει πάντα. 1 Cor. xiii. 7.

of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions' sake."*

II. The objects of devotion. Our next business is to consider what are the objects of devotion. By objects, I mean the purposes or ends at which the practice of public and social devotion aims, and which it proposes to accomplish. The remarks which I have to offer on this subject may be distributed under three heads:—The glory of God;—the preservation of religion in the world;—and the final establishment and glory of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is in itself a matter of the greatest propriety, as it is also our indispensable duty, to "be ready to give a reason of the hope that is in us," and of the religious services in which we engage. "What mean ye by this service?" is an inquiry

* Ps. cxxii. 6—8.

that may with great fairness be put, and every reasonable man will feel it to be incumbent upon him to give a clear and distinct reply to it. The observations that are about to follow may be looked upon as a summary of the particulars which such a reply involves.

1. The glory of God. I place this first, because it is the most important, and at the same time the most comprehensive of all the objects of public and social devotion. We are required to place this object before us in all the engagements of life, and to direct all our secular, much more all our religious actions, by a reference to it. "Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."* It is exceedingly desirable for us to form correct notions on this subject, respecting which there are but too many misconceptions entertained. No one who has

* 1 Cor. x. 31.

learned the elements of religion will imagine, that we are directed to aim at an increase of the natural and essential glory of the Most High. That glory abides the same from everlasting to everlasting: "it is without variableness or the shadow of turning;" and can, in no respect, be affected by human conduct. The piety of men cannot augment it, nor their impiety diminish it. It is as immutable as the Divine nature itself. When, therefore, we speak of promoting the glory of God, we mean such things as follow:—

(1.) That men may promote the glory of God, by acting in consistency with his will. God has formed various wise, righteous, and holy designs, in relation to his government of the world; and his glory is promoted by men, when they act in a manner that is agreeable to his designs, and has a tendency to accomplish them. Such a course of action, steadily and consistently pursued, tends to the development and illustration of God's wisdom

and moral perfection, and to display them to the notice of those who are the witnesses of it. If men attempt to glorify God by actions that are not in strict accordance with his declared will, they subject themselves to the delusions of superstition and fanaticism, and render themselves liable to the accusation of will-worship, and compliance with the traditions of men. God can be glorified only by means which he has himself appointed; and if we, on any pretence, employ different means, we may fear lest the charge should lie against us of "doing evil that good may come." Men have no faculties to fit them for such undertakings, and it will justly be said to them, "Who hath required this at your hands?"

It would be a long task to point out the many mischiefs and miseries that have resulted from mistaken purposes of glorifying God by human inventions. The establishment of unauthorized religious

rites and ceremonies, the imposition of human creeds, articles of faith, and tests of orthodox or right opinions; the persecution of those who refuse to comply with such superstitious fancies, by delivering them to the secular power to deprive them of liberty, goods, and life; show, by painful demonstrations, to what lengths men may go, under the guidance of a fanatical temper, in order to promote the glory of God. The alliance between the church and the state, that has been so much boasted; the taking the church under the special and exclusive patronage of the civil authorities; have proved the means of degrading the church, and debasing it, by making it an engine of secular and ambitious purposes, and rivetting the fetters by which the minds of men have been restrained under the vilest domination. Heresies of various kinds have been productive of very deplorable evils; but they are guiltless compared with the abominations of cruelty and

impiety that have originated in making the sword of the magistrate the guardian of the purity of the church, and its defence against the incursions of false doctrine and schism. Errors of the most pernicious character would have been subdued before the gradual increase of intelligence, literature, and piety, had not force been resorted to, and the emoluments of the church subjected to the disposal of men, who, however high in authority, are strangers to the purity of the christian religion, and altogether careless of it, further than it can be made an instrument of civil influence and political aggrandizement.

The history of past ages, and much of what is still actually passing in the church and in the world, should, therefore, warn us against attempting to glorify God by means which he has not sanctioned.

(2.) The glory of God is promoted by men when they submit to his dispensations without anxiety respecting the result

of them. Humility and submission to the Divine will are represented in the Scriptures as qualities of the most excellent kind, and most acceptable to God. They are so appropriate to the weak, dependent, and short-sighted condition of men, as to approve themselves to our reason in the highest degree. The present life is so much beset with difficulties, both in speculation and practice, that those persons can scarcely fail to be unhappy who are destitute of these qualities. There are numerous duties to be performed which frequently require a large measure of resolution and moral courage. Men are apt to be dissatisfied with such duties, and to complain of the difficulty of performing them: they look out for colourable evasions to fortify them in disregarding them; they think the path that leads to heaven is straiter and narrower than is necessary; and not a few efforts are made to discover a more agreeable road. It must be evident to every

one who reflects on these things, that they are extremely unbecoming the situation and prospects of creatures whose existence on earth is momentary, and is to be succeeded by an unchangeable and eternal state. A deep impression of the danger attendant on this trifling with religious concerns, and a full belief of the supreme wisdom and goodness of God, can alone eradicate these infidel and arrogant notions, and bring us into such a subjection to his uncontrollable will as to induce an acquiescence in his determinations, and a consciousness that we are altogether incompetent judges of his proceedings.

Life is continually exposed to adversity, calamity, and trial. This will not be disputed. In relation to this state of things, men are extremely prone to be disquieted, anxious, and dissatisfied. They know not, in very many cases, the particular reasons why affliction is sent upon them. They are ready to say, What evil have we done? Their passions are

excited, the evil suggestions of a faithless heart are listened to, and the effect too often witnessed is, that affliction, instead of bringing them nearer to God, impels them to a greater distance from him. They refuse to hold converse with him, or to submit, but with extreme impatience, to calamities which they cannot shun. In some instances a sullen hardness of temper is generated; feeling their weakness, and the impotency of their endeavours to relieve themselves, experiencing also the aggravation of wretchedness caused by fretfulness and impatience, they acquire a species of submission which preserves them from bursting forth into injurious imputations on the wisdom and goodness of their Creator; but in this submission there is nothing ingenuous and candid; nothing that resembles him who said, "Even so, Father; for so it seemeth good in thy sight."

It is needless for me to say, that in such instances men do not glorify God;

but the contrast, which every one can put, between such states of feeling and the humility and submission that are characteristic of unfeigned piety, will clearly display the temper and state of the heart by which God is glorified, both in the performance of arduous duties, and the endurance of severe afflictions. Men who quietly and calmly submit themselves to God's disposal, without an undue degree of anxiety with respect to the future consequences of their condition, contentedly committing these, and themselves, and all their interests, to his wise and gracious determination, are glorifying him in the most perfect manner in which this can be done on earth, and are affording to the witnesses of their behaviour an illustrious display of Divine glory, as well as an indisputable proof of their interest in the protection and blessing of God.

(3.) Men promote the glory of God when they honour him by a regular and consistent discharge of the exercises of

public and social devotion. This is the principal design, and most important object of public worship. There are many other purposes to be attained by this means, but this is supremely important. There has never been any form or constitution of religion appointed or approved by God that has not sanctioned and prescribed the practice of public worship; to perform which men have ever met in solemn assemblies, and have united in the different acts that are essential to it. How much this was the case under the dispensation of the Old Testament is too well known to require any illustration. When the numerous and burdensome ceremonies of the law gave place to the establishment of evangelical worship, we find the disciples of Christ regularly frequenting the public assemblies on the Lord's days, and at other appropriate seasons; indeed, the practice of public worship is essential to the maintenance of religion in the world, and that it was so

deemed by the wisest heathen nations is known to every one that has any acquaintance with the practices of ancient times.

On various accounts it is exceedingly requisite to keep these considerations in view, and to regard the glory and worship of God as the supremely important and primary purpose for which the assembling of Christians should be maintained and perpetuated. There is frequently manifested a great forgetfulness of this object by many persons who undervalue every other purpose of christian worship, in comparison with having their feelings powerfully stimulated, and their passions deeply wrought upon; and they become extremely restless, unless they can be gratified to the utmost in these respects. They must have their favourite ministers, and their favourite topics constantly brought before them, or there seems to them to be no sufficient reason for a regular attendance upon the ministry of the gospel, and the public appointments of christian

worship. That the various parts of public worship should be performed with the utmost attention, on the part of those who preside over them, to the edification, instruction, and consolation of the great body of worshippers, is not for a moment to be lost sight of; and if these ends are not answered, on account of some manifest deficiencies in the talents or qualifications of the leaders of public worship, it becomes a reason of great weight for taking due measures to effect an alteration, either by the removal of those that have hitherto led the service, or a withdrawment to some other society, where these ends may be more efficiently answered. But nothing can be more injurious, either to the welfare of christian societies, or the real edification of individual Christians, than a restless, morbid appetite for cordial stimulants, for favourite, exaggerated, and reiterated statements, which aim at the accomplishment of such purposes. It is hard to say which are the most degraded,

those who condescend to gratify propensities so vicious, or those who can be gratified only by such means.

Where a disposition of this kind is become predominant, there is an end of all desire for an enlarged acquaintance with the true sense of the holy Scriptures, for comprehensive views of the entire circle of christian truth and duty; and, in place of it, a too frequent relinquishment of the plain and intelligible doctrines of revelation, for the wild reveries of an enthusiastic fancy, and the chimerical speculations of men, too wise to be submissive to the order which God has appointed, and too imaginative to be contented with that "sound speech which cannot be condemned." Evils of this kind, which cannot be sufficiently deplored, would either be entirely prevented, or greatly diminished, by a frequent recurrence to the principal ends for which christian worship was established, and by a steady adherence to them, as the most

indispensable of all means for promoting the glory of God.

2. The preservation of religion in the world forms one of the great objects of public devotion.

It is extremely difficult to frame an adequate conception of what would be the state of the world without any exercises of public devotion. We have been so long accustomed, even from our infancy, to behold the solemn convocations of Christians for this purpose, and to witness the invaluable blessings which arise from them, that we can scarcely picture to ourselves, by the aid of imagination, the state to which society would be reduced, if these services were at once to be discontinued. We can readily fix upon many great injuries which would inevitably succeed, but we cannot pursue them all to their remote consequences, further than to conclude, that the very appearance of religion would be banished from among men. I shall therefore observe, that

public devotion is essential to sustain the appearance of religion in the world;—that it imposes many beneficial restraints upon men, and disposes them to, at least, a partial compliance with many very important duties;—and that it is the most effective means of "turning men from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God."

(1.) Public devotion is essential to sustain the appearance of religion in the world. Without it, as has just been remarked, the semblance of religion would be banished from among men. The performance of the public services of devotion brings multitudes together for this purpose. Every public assembly of worshippers furnishes and proclaims a declaration to the world, that religion is really obligatory upon men, and that they cannot neglect it, without hazarding their most valuable interests. By the intervention of public religious services, at least on one day in seven, thousands and tens of thousands

publish to their fellow-creatures the reality of religion, and its immediate connexion with their greatest and most lasting happiness. There may be, and unhappily is, but too much of mere custom and insincerity mingled with these public professions; many ends are sought to be answered, which are not in unison with christian duty, properly so called; still the appearance of religion is sustained, and its high behests are solemnly recognised, and made visible to the observance of the world.

Men, who feel an obligation to concur in the public exercises of devotion, bring their children, and other dependents, to be present, at what they themselves consider to be the duty of all; and thus the means of perpetuating a race of worshippers are afforded, and a pledge is given, that, as far as in them lies, the appearances of religion shall not be permitted to cease. Unless, therefore, we are prepared to say that religion itself is useless, we

must concede that the public representation of it to the world is an object of the highest importance.

Some men, indeed, presume to say, that religion has been productive of greater injury than of benefit to the world; and, in support of this absurd paradox, they point to the religious wars that have been waged, and to the endless train of persecutions and murders, proscriptions and miseries, that different sects have perpetrated against one another. No one, however, who calmly, and without prejudice, contemplates the character, genius, and instructions of Christianity, can have the hardihood to maintain that it is responsible for these crimes. Just as well might it be affirmed, that day is the cause of night, and the sun the author of darkness, as that the pure, peaceful, and beneficent instructions of the divine Redeemer are chargeable with producing these frightful enormities. They are to be easily traced to the selfishness, pride, and ambition of

men, altogether estranged from the spirit of Christianity; who have employed religion as a pretext, under the cover of which they might indulge, without control, the vicious propensities of their darkened and perverted minds. "The works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelling, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance; against such there is no law."* That such are the genuine results of religion, and of the want of it, no one that is not devoid of candour and justice will

* Gal. v. 19—23.

undertake to deny. Christians are, therefore, under a pressing obligation to perpetuate the practice of public devotion in the world, as the indispensable instrument for preserving the profession of piety, and preventing the appearances of religion from being lost.

No other plan that can be adopted is sufficient to produce this effect, with constancy and unfailing success. Human laws for the maintenance of the profession of religion are altogether inefficient for the purpose, as has been a thousand times witnessed. Our own country supplies instances in point, without number. The sanguinary and persecuting enactments of past centuries, during the reigns of our Tudors and Stuarts, aimed ostensibly at the preservation of a public profession of religion. Men were compelled to frequent the established places of worship, and to conform to the religious rites ordained by civil authority, under penalties of the most severe and rigid

character; but these methods of extorting compliance with religious services have proved to be altogether ineffective: when the spirit of piety is evaporated, the form and appearance will speedily decay. Most happily these methods of compelling men to attend on religious services, by edict, and legislative enactment, are abandoned, from a conviction of their utter uselessness, and inefficiency for the purposes at which they aimed: and men are now learning, in some measure, that conscience is not to be coerced by acts of parliament, nor the institutions of religion to be upheld by penal statutes.

Some remnants, notwithstanding, of this misguided zeal are still left among us; and many an ardent wish is yet breathed forth, that the licentiousness of modern sectaries, and the irregularities of voluntary worship, might be restrained, and again brought under the compression of the wholesome severities of ecclesiastical sway. Too many also of those who might have

been supposed to be better instructed, display a hankering for legislative interference in matters of religion; and they would particularly have the Lord's day sanctified, and the institutions of religion maintained by the same unhallowed means; the insufficiency of which, and the mischief, have been demonstrated a thousand times. The proper business of statesmen and legislators, let it be remembered, is with the concerns of this world; but the support of religion, and the protection of its sanctity, are not committed to them. They cannot touch the ark of God without polluting it; nor interfere with the precepts of Christ, without weakening their authority. Let them cultivate, as they are bound to do, the christian temper for themselves; let them afford aid, in their personal and private capacities, to the utmost of their means, to uphold the profession of religion, and the preservation of its honourable appearance; let them, without restriction,

patronize, in this way, the particular denomination of Christians of which they most approve; but let them fear to profane the religion of Jesus Christ, by adding to its sanctions the sword of the magistrate, and the aid of enactments, that intrench on the perfect freedom of conscience, and on those liberties which the Governor of the world has made the birthright of man. If persons in authority, and generally the higher ranks, are disposed to maintain the appearance of piety among the subordinate classes, they will most surely attain their purpose, by abstaining from every outrage on the sanctity of the Lord's day; by a careful and unremitting attendance upon the duties appropriate to that day; and thus showing, what they cannot do by restrictive laws, that they sincerely venerate the institutions of religion, and feel an earnest wish to perpetuate the sacred observance of them. In the mean time, whatever may be the course which other men adopt,

all upright persons, of every christian denomination, will give their suffrage to the benefit derived from the public performances of devotion, by their steady and persevering discharge of them.

(2.) Public devotion imposes many beneficial restraints upon men, and disposes them to, at least, a partial compliance with many important duties. There prevails in the world some considerable degree of regard to public opinion, and to consistency. The generality of men feel, that an attendance on the public services of religion must, in order to secure them from the stigma of hypocrisy, be accompanied, more or less, by a departure from notorious crimes, and a performance, at least, of some of the more ostensible practices of religion. They would experience a degree of shame at being detected in any unusual inconsistencies of this kind. Public opinion, and the censorship of neighbourhoods, come in aid of the direct instruction communi-

cated by the services of religion: and many a criminal suggestion is resisted, because it cannot be gratified without a loss of reputation; and many an appearance of generosity, charity, and concern for the public good, is sustained by a wish, on the part of numbers, to cultivate the good opinion of those with whom they are associated in the public institutions of religion. It is greatly more to the general advantage, that such imperfect compliance with the injunctions of Christianity should be practised, than that an open disregard and utter defiance of restraint should become universally prevalent. In the absence of higher principles and purer motives, these effects contribute to a diminution of the mass of moral evil, and to render a public homage to the truth and supreme importance of piety.

There is some reason to hope that men, who thus "do many things," perhaps, to a certain extent, "gladly," may, by the exercises of devotion which they frequent,

be induced to scrutinize their motives, and to inquire how far they fall short of the proper standard of religion; and if a serious purpose of this nature be formed, it may probably become the means of rendering them, instead of the votaries of custom and fashion, the worshippers of Him "who is a Spirit, in spirit and in truth." As long as men, from any motives, entirely absent themselves from religious assemblies, they do what they can to extinguish the light of wisdom and sanctity in the world; they demonstrate themselves to be among the number of the open and avowed enemies of God and men; and they willingly place themselves out of the reach of any improvement. Happy would it be if such persons would consider what the end of these things will prove.

(3.) Public devotion is the most effective means of "turning men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God."

The conversion of sinners is said, by our Lord himself, to be a cause of joy in heaven; and certainly it would be an indication of a very low state of personal piety, if such an event were to produce no similar sentiment on earth. Men are frequently inclined to treat the subject of the evil influence of malignant and powerful spirits over sinners, of which the Scriptures speak with great clearness as to the fact, and with frequent reference to the importance of it, with levity and ridicule. Others, not so lost to all reverence for the sacred volume, contrive, by specious criticisms and subtle reasonings, to persuade themselves and others, that what the Scriptures affirm on this subject is to be understood so metaphorically, as that, in fact, it comes to have no meaning at all. Much objection has been made, very justly, to the trivial and minute accounts that have been, and continue to be given, of the temptations of Satan; and no small portion of absurdity

has been broached on the matter, which has excited great prejudice and aversion to the plain statement, that events of this kind actually take place. But it is not the part of either piety or wisdom to permit the mistaken representations of fanciful and enthusiastic persons so to act upon the judgment, as to contravene one of the facts, most thoroughly authenticated by the volume of revelation.

In that sacred book, the world is asserted to be in a state of spiritual subjection to the prince of darkness, "the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience;" who is said to "go about, as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." Let it then be considered, how frightful and alarming a condition this is, to "be led captive by the devil at his will;" to be influenced by that malignant being, who has set himself, from the beginning of the world, to oppose and frustrate the determinations of the almighty God, and to propagate

and perpetuate rebellion among his creatures. How far he has been permitted to succeed in the prosecution of purposes so unnatural and impious, we have but too many manifest proofs, drawn from the history of men in all ages. The opposition that has been made against God, the base, stupid, polluted, and deadly idolatries that have reigned over the fairest regions of the globe, and which still maintain their power, over hundreds of millions of the human race, are ascribed to him, under whose fatal suggestions every species of cruelty has been inflicted on mankind, by desolating wars, by domineering superstitions, by self-immolation, and by the sacrifices of millions, not sparing the helplessness and unconscious innocence of infancy, offered at the shrines of his agents and emissaries. His purpose is to drag the sons of men through all the diversified miseries and torments which his malicious ingenuity and subtlety can devise, and to thrust them finally into

that den and bottomless pit of perdition, to which he knows himself to be destined.

In proportion as we believe, and are suitably affected by these representations, which the holy Scriptures unhesitatingly give of the power and malignity of Satan, we shall rejoice in every instance, with which we become acquainted, of unhappy and degraded mortals being rescued from so tremendous a captivity, and being brought into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

Various and diversified means are employed by Divine goodness and power to effect these beneficent purposes; but none is so extensive or effectual as the proclamation of the gospel continually made by the agency of public devotion. This is the grand instrument which God has provided to destroy the empire of Satan, and to prepare the subjects of his own everlasting kingdom in heaven for the blessedness and glory to which he has determined to bring them. We witness

the powerful and salutary effects of the employment of this instrument; and if our bosoms retain a spark of love to the blessed Saviour, of regard to the honour of God, or of sympathetic and beneficent feeling for human interests, we shall rejoice in its success, and maintain, by our unremitting exertions, the continuance of a ministry so essential to the happiness and salvation of a lost world, and with which the glory of God is so closely combined. The conversion of one sinner excites joy in heaven, what then must be the exultation and delight experienced in that blessed state at beholding tens of thousands redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, purified by the influence of his Spirit, and, after a vigorous employment of their powers in extending and consolidating the empire of their Redeemer and Lord upon earth, advance, one by one, to join that multitude which no one can number, and to ascribe "blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, unto

Him that sitteth upon the throne; and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever? If he who converts one sinner from the error of his ways is blessed, how large a reward is reserved for all who strenuously uphold the cause of pure and enlightened devotion, and employ their utmost energies to diffuse it to the ends of the earth!

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE MANNER OF PRAYER.

It has already been observed, that the purpose of this work is to promote improvement in the performance of the duties of public and social devotion. On this account, nothing peculiarly applicable to private prayer has been introduced, though a considerable part of all that has been advanced may, with advantage, be applied to this most necessary and indispensable duty. The various topics relative to public and social prayer which have been discussed belong expressly to the duty, purposes, and objects of such

religious services. The nature of my design leads me, next, to notice the manner in which such services should be conducted, so as to insure, with the Divine blessing, the greatest degree of propriety, acceptance, and usefulness.

As I wish now to attract the attention of my brethren in the ministry to the remarks which I intend respectfully to place before them, I beg to disclaim, at the commencement, every thing approaching to dictation, censure, or personality. I shall refer to no instances but what appear to me to be improprieties of manner, without the most distant allusion to any individual persons whatever. Perhaps I may be permitted to offer as some apology for tendering to others advice, of which I myself may stand equally or more in need, the experience of nearly forty years, spent, with great imperfections I am fully aware, in discharging the offices of a pastor, preacher, and tutor. I shall not, I hope, arrogate

to myself any undue importance from this allusion to my past employments, since I advance it altogether as a reason why I may avoid the imputation of such an impropriety. My wish is, also, to draw the attention of those persons who are frequently engaged in leading the devotional services of social meetings, to the great desirableness of discharging these duties in the most becoming and acceptable manner: I say nothing of the heads of families who conduct the domestic devotions of their own houses, because the remarks which will be made are equally applicable to them, as to the classes of which I have just spoken. I shall only observe further, that careful attention to the manner of prayer is exceedingly important, and that it cannot fail to be accompanied by sensible and satisfactory improvement.

It is well known that objections against the manner of conducting public worship by the use of extempore, or more properly,

of free prayer, in use among almost all classes of Dissenters, as well as among the members of the Established Church of Scotland, are frequently alleged by our Episcopalian brethren, who almost invariably, if not universally, conduct this part of Divine worship by the forms of the Book of Common Prayer. My opinion of that book was stated at the commencement of this work, and will not be repeated. It is more to my purpose to remark, that the objections alleged against the use of free prayer are derived from two sources; one, which rests upon the employment of such prayer, in whatever manner it may be performed; and the other derives its force from the improprieties of manner that are sometimes witnessed in the use of it, and which are supposed to be nearly, if not entirely, inseparable from it. I shall beg attention, for a short time, to the first of these objections, leaving the second to be obviated by the remarks which it is my

intention to offer respecting the most appropriate modes of discharging the duty of public and social prayer.

There are two or three preliminary remarks which I wish to make, before I proceed to a direct consideration of the objection against the use of free prayer, to which I have alluded.

I. Preliminary remarks.

1. Both evangelical Episcopalians and orthodox Nonconformists agree in maintaining, that among the endowments which are imparted to true Christians by the influence of the Holy Spirit, there is one, known by the description of the spirit of prayer. This endowment is referred to by the prophet Zechariah, who, speaking in the name of the God of Israel, says, "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace, and of supplications." This declaration all Christians believe to be accomplished under the dispensation of the gospel. On this point

there is so little difference of opinion that nothing needs be said in support of it. It may, notwithstanding, be expedient to state in what sense I understand the proposition, that the spirit of prayer, common to Christians, is an endowment proceeding from the agency of the Holy Spirit. I shall assume, without debating the matter, the fact, that men never pray with faith and sincerity for spiritual blessings, until they become sensible that they are in danger of perishing without them: they that are conscious of no sickness feel not the need of a physician. It is equally a fact, that this sensibility of want is imparted by the influence of the Spirit of God.

Wherever a due degree of the feeling now noticed is experienced, it will naturally be expressed by humble and fervent petitions, addressed to the Giver of all spiritual benefits. This sentiment of the heart, and the supplications prompted by it, is what is here meant by a spirit of

prayer,—the gracious endowment of the Holy Spirit. It is far from being my belief, that this spirit is never exerted through the medium of a form of words; on the contrary, I have the fullest persuasion that there are numerous cases in which the first efforts to pray in faith and sincerity are exerted in this way; but it appears to me to be generally, if not universally true, that, in the further progress of religion, preconceived forms become too narrow and insufficient to express the varied and deep emotions of the soul, which force an utterance for themselves, in terms more agreeable to their urgency. I know not to what but this the apostle refers, when he says, "The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us, with groanings which cannot be uttered."* The general effect of this state of mind and feeling is to produce a habit of praying independently of forms;

* Rom. viii. 26.

in addition to which, a desire is commonly experienced to strengthen this habit; and it would certainly be an indication of some great defect, if this desire were not to take place. Repeated exercise, and earnest endeavour, finally succeed; and thus the spirit of prayer is generated, and made as habitually perfect, as the different faculties and attainments of individual Christians admit.

I am quite sensible, that the early associations of pious persons modify, to a considerable extent, the process that has now been described. In cases where the general association is with persons who are attached to the use of prescribed forms, the tendency is powerfully felt towards them; but where the first religious connexions are among those who pray without forms, a contrary inclination takes place, and that, which I certainly cannot but regard as the original and natural course, of praying without the aid, or shall I say, the incumbrance of

forms, is adopted. If the statement now made be correct, as I imagine few candid persons, of any considerable experience, will deny, it must be regarded as a very powerful argument in favour of the use of free prayer.

2. It is a well-known fact, that among Episcopalians, the most pious and excellent clergymen sanction the use of free prayer, by their own private practice, and by encouraging the same mode in the private societies which are formed among the more serious members of their congregations; and I apprehend they would consider it as an intolerable grievance to be compelled, by their ecclesiastical superiors, to discontinue such a practice. This also must, I think, be admitted as an argument *ad hominem*, at least, that proves strongly in favour of praying without forms, both in private and in social exercises of devotion. Many zealous churchmen will, I am sensible, urge, in reply to this argument, that such

are not the practices of the more learned, respectable, and orthodox clergy; and this I shall not question; it is, I believe, strictly true. But what is the consequence of this? Is it not that among the congregations over which such clergymen preside, there are to be found few, if any, such social or private assemblies formed? I shall leave my readers to deduce their own conclusion from the premises.

3. I beg to observe, that I have no wish to plead for the universal relinquishment of forms of prayer: I would lay down no such rule. On many occasions forms may be employed with great advantage, both in private devotion, and in the discharge of the important duty of family prayer. Some good men, from their having little readiness of expression, from their deficiency in mental culture, or from their want of self-possession, may employ such helps, with benefit to themselves and others. There are also seasons of weariness, dejection of feeling, and a want of

energy, from which the most intelligent and spiritual are not always free, when recourse may very properly be had to the assistance of suitable forms.

The chief point of controversy, however, relates to the manner of performing the public services of devotion. A large part of what has been urged on both sides is, I imagine, the result of early association and prepossession; some of it has originated in the want of a sufficiently extensive acquaintance with the subject, and not a little must, I fear, be ascribed to the powerful and pernicious influence of party spirit. I cannot conclude these preliminary remarks without an expression of the full certainty which I feel, that this question would have been debated with comparatively little alienation of feeling, but for the interference of an usurped authority to impose an exclusive mode of conducting the public services of religion. I have no wish to revive the painful recollections of former ages, but I must

regard it as an evil of very great magnitude, that the genius of churches established by law, is essentially exclusive. The most learned and excellent clergyman belonging to the Church of England is prohibited from making the smallest deviation from the established ritual; he can neither do this, nor can he permit any christian minister, of any other communion, English or foreign, however recommended by learning and piety, to officiate in his church. One only exception exists to this otherwise exclusive rule—a Catholic priest, who quits his former connexions, may, without re-ordination, be admitted to officiate in consecrated edifices; but no Protestant ordination, save that by an Anglican Bishop, elevates the subject of it above the rank of "pretended holy orders," or warrants his performing, in any one instance, any service in the established church. In what light this exclusive system is regarded by the only Sovereign of the christian church, whose

precept is, "receive ye one another, as Christ also received us, to the glory of God,"* must be left to the calm determination of every candid and christian churchman. Were liberty granted to use free prayer, in combination with a liturgy, or to permit the episcopal clergyman to associate with himself occasionally a Protestant minister of any other communion, or himself to officiate in other edifices besides those that are consecrated by episcopal rites, as often as convenience and propriety admitted, a large part indeed of the objections against the use of a liturgy would be removed. But no justification can be found, except in the rule—

"Sic volo, sic jubeo, stat pro ratione voluntas,"

for the exclusiveness which pervades the Church of England. It is productive of evils to the unity of christian profession;

* Rom. xv. 7.

it perpetuates what, in that church, is denominated schism; it almost necessarily inclines every clergyman to indulge in imaginary notions of superiority over all other Protestant ministers; and it tends, by attempting the degradation of such ministers, to confirm them in hostility to the church and its services. Having made these preliminary observations, I shall proceed,

II. To notice some of the arguments that are employed to maintain the superiority of the manner in which the public devotional services of the Church of England over the manner in which nonconforming worship is carried on, by the exercise of free prayer.

1. The great excellency of the liturgy is not unfrequently represented as tantamount to all other arguments, and alone sufficient to repel all objections that can be made against it. My opinion of the Book of Common Prayer has been already expressed: many of the

devotional parts of it have been allowed to possess very great excellency; but it is ranked so high by many of its enthusiastic panegyrists, as alone to furnish a sufficient reason why no attendant upon episcopal worship should, on any account, forsake it. They have recorded it as their deliberate judgment, that the excellency of the liturgy is so great as to compensate the entire want of piety in the officiating ministers of the church, and the constant inculcation of the most destructive doctrines from the pulpit. The conservation of orthodoxy is expected from it; and so great is its influence, that even the entire body of Dissenters from the church are indebted to it for the preservation of true religion among them. It is foreign from my purpose to discuss such matters as these at large, or, I imagine, it would be a business of no great difficulty to show, that the converse is nearer the truth, and that the church is more indebted to Dissenters

than to the liturgy for the great increase of true religion that has so happily taken place in it within the last sixty or seventy years, and in which I unfeignedly and greatly rejoice.

The state of religion in the church, immediately prior to the exertions of Whitefield and Wesley, is too well known to have been extremely deplorable to require any particular proof of it. If it be said, they were not Dissenters, it will remain for those who make the assertion to show, how men can be properly denominated otherwise, who themselves set at defiance the authorities of the church, abandoned many of its essential rules, and established large communities of worshippers, who have entirely departed from communion with it. No more remarkable instance of attachment to party, and of the influence of party feelings, can be cited, than the unmeasured eulogiums passed on the Common Prayer, and the ascription of effects to it, to

which it certainly has not the smallest pretension. Had not an impulse of extraordinary force been given to religion in the church, by the labours of the men to whom I have alluded, there is every reason to believe that it would have gone on to deteriorate, notwithstanding all the imagined superiority of worship conducted agreeably to its forms. The men, be it remembered, who ministered in these forms, were almost universally devoid of the spirit which they are thought to be so admirable a medium of keeping alive. As, then, I cannot admit the influence of the Common Prayer to be adequate to the support of a church which, notwithstanding its perpetual use, was palpably departing from the truth and purity of the gospel, I am unable to yield to such an argument, for the sole and exclusive employment of it, as the instrument of conducting public worship.

2. An argument for the exclusive use of forms is drawn from their utility

in maintaining the uniformity of worship.

Uniformity is a word of ominous import in the judgment of those who know somewhat of the price that has already been paid for the support of it. The observations made in the last section sufficiently show what the uniformity is, which the exclusive use of the Book of Common Prayer produces: it is an uniformity of difformity. What can be less uniform than evangelical sentiments expressed in prayer, and sentiments the most contrary to them delivered from the pulpit? Within the remembrance of the writer of these pages, the Church of England comprehended among its clergy men holding opinions of the utmost diversity, extending from high Calvinism through the gradations of moderate Calvinism, Arminianism, Pelagianism, and Arianism of different shades, down to the lowest degrees of Unitarianism; I say nothing of the numbers of openly irreligious,

profane, and intemperate individuals that were found assuming to themselves the appellation of the ministers of Christ, and daring to reproach men of exalted piety and unblemished character, because they could not conscientiously unite themselves to a church established by human laws. It has been a charge frequently brought against Dissenters, that they are divided into endless parties, and that their dissent from the church is not carried on with greater rancour than the dissensions and disagreements which exist among themselves. They do not, however, throw a covering of uniformity around their diversities, nor merge their essential variations of opinion in a subscription to articles of faith, nor profess an union of speculative belief in relation to matters where no union exists.

A clergyman of distinguished eminence, whose writings have been exceedingly useful, has expressed his belief to be, that the Articles of the Church of England

were not imposed to exhibit an uniformity of faith in all the multifarious topics which they involve; this he holds to be impossible, but that they were framed as articles of peace. I acknowledge I should have found great difficulty in assigning any definite meaning to this assertion, had not the gifted and respectable author of it spared me the trouble of so doing, by an explanation which is indeed sufficiently intelligible, but which leads to consequences of the most dangerous nature. I have many times read the Thirty-nine Articles, and they appear to me to be drawn up in terms as little liable to misconception as any that can well be used; and I am persuaded that the venerable persons who were concerned in drawing them up, little thought of the use that would be assigned to them in succeeding ages. Trifling with subscriptions and solemn declarations is an evil of the most pernicious character; and I should imagine that the celebrated writer to whom we are indebted for this

salvo, must himself have subsequently looked upon it as more ingenious than either solid or correct. The differences of judgment which obtain among the various classes of Dissenters, and the frequent collisions that result from them, are far enough from being either desirable or praiseworthy; but there is found among them no such species of diversity between the prayers and the sermons which they employ, as exists in the Established Church. Public opinion, by which I mean the opinions that are held by individual churches, operates much more powerfully in preserving a consistency between the several parts of their public worship, than any compulsory formulas or subscriptions that, in very numerous instances, are made, either in unacquaintedness with the subjects that are involved in them, or from a manifest wish to share in the public favour, and in the reputation, honours, and emoluments which a richly-endowed establishment has to confer.

The argument, therefore, which is drawn from the use of prescribed forms in promoting uniformity, falls to the ground. It will be a conclusion altogether remote from truth and reality, if any of my readers should suppose that the remarks which have now been made originate in any hostile feeling to the honourable and consistent supporters of the Established Church. So far is this from being the case, that I regard numbers, both of its clergy and laity, as among the most excellent of Christians; and for many I entertain sentiments of the utmost respect and warmest affection. My objections do not apply to persons, but to system; and I should be a traitor against a cause, which, in my inmost conscience, I believe to be the cause of freedom, of truth, and of God, if, in discussing such topics, I were to dissemble and conceal the clearest convictions of my understanding, under general expressions, adapted to conciliate the favour of even the best and most excellent

persons from whom I conscientiously dissent.

The first religious impressions which I experienced in early youth, were produced chiefly by the agency of clergymen, for whose memory I retain, in advanced years, the most affectionate and grateful remembrances, and whom, I am permitted to hope, I shall meet, at no very distant day, in a world where there will be found neither churchmen nor dissenters; a world from which all discord will be banished, and where one grand and consolidating bond of love will be cemented, to endure for ever. Could I have looked upon the Book of Common Prayer with indiscriminate approbation, and have made vows of conformity and canonical obedience without repugnance, I should, in all probability, have now been ministering at the altars of the Established Church, and never have been numbered among the obscure adherents of a despised, and oftentimes misconceived and misrepresented nonconformity.

3. It is urged as an argument in defence of exclusive forms of prayer, that congregations can more easily unite in them than in free or extemporaneous prayers.

On this I would remark, that a great deal depends on habit. What men frequently do, they do more readily. Hence they feel a repugnance to what they have not been accustomed. At the same time, I freely admit that the argument is not without force: it cannot, however, be denied, that the continued use of the same forms is likely to generate inattention, and, unless an unremitting exertion be made to prevent it, the thoughts will wander during the recital of the well-known words, which at length come to be repeated mechanically and without effort. Were the prayers that are delivered without forms slowly and distinctly enunciated, with pauses sufficiently long interposed between each of the sentences of which they consist, and the whole uttered with due and discriminate

emphasis, so as to prevent a drawling monotony of manner, few persons would experience difficulty in accompanying them. It is chiefly to the hurried consecution of sentences, and the absence of sufficient clearness and energy of pronunciation, that the difficulty of going along with the speaker is to be attributed. This is, in my opinion, a matter in the highest degree worthy of attentive regard from those to whom the conducting of public devotion is committed. A combination of both the modes of devotion would, I think, be productive of the best effects. The responsive form of the litany is, in my apprehension, well adapted to maintain attention, by giving, as well to the congregation as to the officiating minister, an active part in the service. There is, I fear, at present, little hope of effecting any changes of this kind either in conforming or nonconforming congregations. The imposition of form, and the exclusion of all innovation, is

but too likely to continue in the Established Church; and among Nonconformists there prevails so great a dislike to what is unusual, that any improvement of this nature seems to be hopeless. On this account, it becomes the more imperative on those who lead the worship that is conducted by free prayer, to employ every method of improvement in the discharge of it that can be suggested.

4. The danger of erroneous sentiments, of unbecoming language, and of tiresome repetitions, is further urged against the adoption of the practice of free prayer.

That such consequences may arise, it is impossible to deny; and the greater part of what is to follow in this chapter is intended to meet this danger. I may just remark in this place, with reference to the objection that is stated, that if it be carried out to its fullest extent, it will apply with as much force to sermons as to prayers. There is no such material difference between the

two kinds of composition, as to ensure the propriety of the sermon, while the prayer is unsusceptible of a similar guarantee. Few persons will, however, I imagine, be found to advocate the invariable use of one prescribed sermon or homily. Nothing that belongs to man is beyond the reach of abuse; and the utmost that can be done, is to employ all due caution and care to prevent it as far as is possible; ever remembering, that the abuse of what is intrinsically good can never be justly pleaded as an argument against the proper use of it.

III. I shall now proceed to state some of the objections which may fairly be alleged against the employment of prescribed forms in the exercise of public devotion.

1. I have sufficiently noticed the objection to forms which are so strictly imposed, as that nothing short of an act of the legislature can alter a single expression, or remove the exclusive character

which belongs to the worship of the Established Church. All well-informed and consistent Nonconformists will ever demur to the introduction of this species of authority, because it is the invasion of a province that lies beyond its sphere. The parties by whom the branches of the legislature are composed are not the persons best fitted, by their general character, or previous habits, to determine such matters. No authority of this kind has ever been delegated to them by Him who has appointed "the powers that be:" nor can arguments be founded upon just theory, or universal experience, to warrant the fitness of such an intrusion. The state, in its legislative capacity, will never be allowed, by intelligent Dissenters, to interfere with the modes of worship among them; and it is but justice to acknowledge, that our present leading statesmen are little disposed to carry on a crusade for the support of an authority to which they are aware they have no claim.

I can scarcely quit this topic without a remark or two respecting the course that is unhappily adopted by many of the most opulent of those who, in days that are past, were willing to retain the connexion with nonconformity, which they inherited from their pious and consistent ancestors. Not a few of such persons have, of late years, either avowed themselves to have become churchmen, while, on expedient occasions, they retain their former connexions in some respects; or who, while they still profess themselves to belong to the nonconformist body, desert its ministers, its churches, and its public worship, and are found swelling the congregations of some popular and acceptable preachers in the Established Church. If such men have discovered the superior excellence and truth of a church established by law, why do they not openly and consistently follow the dictates of their enlightened judgment? Why do they not altogether separate

themselves from conventicles and their frequenters, who are pronounced by the church to which they manifest so strong an affection to be stained with the defilement of schism, polluted by a perverse rebellion against the authorized successors of the apostles, and, in fine, to be abandoned to "the uncovenanted mercies of God?" Surely it is more honourable for men to act with decision and consistency than to subject themselves, by their vacillating and irregular conduct, to the imputation of base, interested, and unworthy motives. "If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him."

Dissenters have little reason, on their own account, to regret the defection of such persons; but rather have cause to congratulate themselves on being freed from the intrusions of false brethren, who would willingly have become lords over the heritage of God had they not been restrained by inflexible opposition to their

usurpations; and influenced by a wish to mingle more freely, without animadversion, among the votaries of fashion and the observances of the elegant, well-bred, and polished multitudes, who follow, without remorse, the current of public and indiscriminating opinion. It is certainly a remarkable fact, that while the congregations of Nonconformists have been augmented, in later years, to multitudes which would have excited the astonishment of past generations, that these accessions have accrued so greatly from the middle and lower classes, that scarcely are there to be found among them any persons of aristocratic descent, and, I believe, not one individual of noble birth. A good deal of remark has, within a few years, been made respecting the numerous instances among dissenting ministers, in which they have solicited and obtained episcopal ordination. With a large proportion of these persons I have had more or less personal intercourse; and though,

I presume not to arraign the secret motives by which they have been actuated, it comes within my own knowledge that several, even of the best of them, have been thwarted and disappointed men, who, finding little encouragement among their early connexions, have quitted them with various ostensible apologies, into the truth or force of which I have no disposition to scrutinize. My most prevalent wish for them is, that they may find greater happiness and greater usefulness than they reaped from their former associations, and that they may never be haunted by secret apprehensions that they have forsaken the straight path of integrity and honour. Should these pages fall into the hands of any of those with whom I have had personal intercourse, I would entreat, for their own sakes, that they will be cautious in animadverting upon their former friends, and stand aloof from the disingenuous and insidious criticisms of "autobiographers," anonymous or avowed.

2. Free prayer is better adapted than any forms can be, to express the varied sentiments of the heart. Every experienced Christian, churchman or dissenter, must admit this, if he have been long accustomed to serious and frequent intercourse with God. Forms of prayer must be drawn up in general terms, since it is impossible to include in them all the various and multiplied diversities by which christian experience is marked. General expressions are, it is well known, much less effective in moving the feelings than a distinct specification of the individual necessities that press upon the heart. Indiscriminate language constantly repeated begets tedium, and has a powerful effect in rendering prayer a mere mechanical exertion, which is carried on without any vivid impressions or strong emotions. It may be said, that wise and truly devout men will check this tendency, and, by unremitting attention, prevent the evil that is alluded to. And it is doubtless

true, that wise and really devout and spiritual worshippers will, in their own individual cases, obviate the inconveniences that are more or less inseparable from all modes of conducting public devotion, and derive from them the advantages which they are respectively adapted to produce.

3. A very forcible argument for the use of free prayer in public worship, arises from the effect which it cannot fail to have on the ministers by whom it is conducted. Any man, whether pious or the contrary, who is capable of reading aloud with propriety, may officiate in the use of forms; but the difficulty becomes much greater, and the test of personal religion much more effective, in the case of free prayer. There must necessarily be a considerable share of religious knowledge acquired, and a strong semblance, at least, of devout feeling, to enable any one to conduct, without written forms, the worship of congregations, among

which there will be many able to form a correct judgment of the manner in which this office is performed. To lead the devotions of a number of intelligent and religious persons, during a course of years, is an attainment not to be made by every man. That insincere and irreligious persons may make such an attainment, in some cases, is too evident from painful experience to be controverted; but the instances must be comparatively rare. I should look for a great deterioration of ministerial fitness and character, were the practice of free prayer to be generally discontinued in nonconforming assemblies; and there can be no doubt but that the endeavours which must be made by ministers to enable them to discharge these offices in an acceptable and useful manner, must be productive of no inconsiderable influence upon the state of their own character and feelings. I shall protract this subject no further; it is somewhat remote from the principal

object of this work, but I could not, with propriety, altogether pass it over in silence.

IV. I shall now advance to the main object of this chapter, which is, to state the means of discharging the duty of public and social devotion in a manner free from just censure; and which shall be conducive to the improvement and consolation of the worshippers; honourable to the great and blessed object of all devotion; and shall obviate the objections that are made to the use of free prayer, drawn from the improprieties which are sometimes represented as inseparable from it. I shall arrange these observations under the heads of—the substance, the style, the language, and the method of prayer.

1. The substance of prayer: by this I intend a due distribution of the several subjects which constitute the matter of prayer. The different parts and objects of prayer have already been enumerated

and considered, and are not now again to be noticed ; my present design is to consider the way in which those several parts should be disposed, so as to prevent a deficiency of topics, and to avoid the repetitions, which are often felt to be extremely wearisome, and prejudicial to the proper influence of devotion on those who unite in it.

It is essential to every prayer that is delivered in public, that it be rendered appropriate to the particular purposes for which it is engaged in. The prayers of most public services, among dissenting congregations, consist of an introductory, a general, and a concluding prayer. The most usual practice is, to make the first and the last short; the first, to comprise topics adapted to bring the minds of the worshippers into a becoming state of feeling and attention; the last, to impress the subject of the discourse that has been delivered upon the memory and the heart. The general or principal prayer is, there-

fore, that to which the present observations are intended chiefly to relate. I have recited this course because I believe it is the one most commonly adopted in our congregational services; though I am inclined to think, that an alteration might be made in it with advantage. The change to which I refer is, to make the first two prayers of more equal length. We not unfrequently hear of the weariness, both of body and mind, that is occasioned by one prayer, extended perhaps to nearly half an hour in length: to prevent this undesirable effect, it seems that two prayers, occupying each from ten to fifteen minutes, with an interval between them to be filled up by singing, and reading the Scriptures, would be found advantageous. If the service were commenced by singing a short psalm or hymn, to be followed by the first of the two principal prayers that have now been suggested, and succeeded by the interval that has been mentioned, there would

certainly be less weariness occasioned, and the attention would probably be kept up during the latter of the two prayers without difficulty. I mention this, however, only in passing, and advert again to the distribution and arrangement of the topics which make up the substance of public devotion. It will be recollected that the parts of prayer have been stated to consist of adoration, humiliation, confession, self-renunciation, expressions of dependence on God, thanksgiving and praise, and intercession. It is not altogether immaterial in what order these several parts succeed each other, though this must be determined chiefly by the special purposes for which the congregation is assembled.

No commencement of public prayer can be more appropriate than that of offering adoration to the great Being, who is the object in which the entire exercise of devotion is to terminate: still it may, with sufficient propriety, occupy

some other place in the service; and all the different parts may frequently and advantageously change the order of succession. On some occasions more latitude may be given to some of the parts than to others, and a variation of order will be serviceable, in preventing the uniformity and sameness which it is exceedingly desirable to avoid. I may, perhaps, be permitted to observe, that, as far as my acquaintance extends with the manner in which public prayer is offered, adoration of the nature, character, and works of the Most High, frequently occupies a less prominent part than it should. No part of prayer is more fitted to excite devout and lowly feeling than this; for which reason it would be well, on some occasions, to dilate the thoughts and expressions which are comprehensive of it. All these are, however, considerations of inferior importance to that which I attach to the propriety of making this order, selection, and variation of the

subjects of prayer, an object of serious reflection and antecedent preparation.

There is reason to think, that, while great attention is paid to the study and composition of sermons, engagements in prayer are frequently commenced without any attentive premeditation. It is not my purpose to say how much of such preparation is requisite, but I would take the liberty of respectfully requesting my brethren, especially the younger of them, to consider, whether a due measure of it would not prove advantageous to the consistency of prayer; the consistency, I mean, of the regularity of proceeding through its several parts. Some prayers manifest no order, no distribution of parts, no particular or definite object, but all kinds of topics are heaped together in an incoherent and confused manner, which renders it exceedingly more difficult for the congregation to unite with them, than when a due attention is directed to such matters. Some such premedita-

tion would conduce greatly to the avoidance of unseemly repetitions, than which scarcely any thing can be more injurious to the temper of devotion. An appearance is often made of being about to conclude the address, when some one or more of the subjects that have already been dwelt upon are introduced afresh, and by this means a prayer is made to include several commencements and several terminations. Attention to the topics that are now suggested would greatly tend to the variety of subject and expression, which it is extremely requisite to cultivate, not for the purpose of gratifying a most unseasonable vanity, either in the minister or the congregation, but to stimulate attention, and preserve it from flagging through the service. I shall terminate these remarks by a hint respecting the impropriety of a too minute specification of particulars in that part of prayer which consists of intercession. We sometimes hear this part of the service so

conducted, as to wear the appearance of compliment to the parties who are referred to; of a wish to announce particulars of information respecting different persons; and sometimes to convey the semblance of a fear, lest the great Object of our worship should be inattentive to our requests, unless we introduced a minute specification of particulars; or as if we were actuated by a desire to inform him of some things of which he is ignorant. It must, I imagine, be obvious to every considerate person, that such a mode greatly differs from the simplicity, unaffectedness, and majestic solemnity which spread over devotional exercises their greatest charm, and most attractive influence.

2. The style most appropriate to prayer is the next topic of attention. The style best adapted to this ever solemn and serious engagement is plain, direct, simple, and pure.

(1.) The style of prayer should be plain. By this qualification I intend the absence

of figurative or poetical expressions. This, however, is not to be understood so strictly as to exclude every kind of figure from the style of prayer. It is the nature of strong emotions to express themselves in language removed in some degree from perfect plainness. Thus the royal Psalmist, under the influence of powerful desire, breaks forth oftentimes into expressions that are highly poetical. "Keep me as the apple of the eye; hide me under the shadow of thy wings."*—"As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God! My soul thirsteth for God."† It is evident from such, and numerous other examples that might be cited, that the soul, when strongly excited, feels the ordinary modes of expression to be weak and cold, and not sufficiently indicative of the fervency of feeling by which it is actuated; it therefore looks out without design for

* Psalm xvii. 8. † Psalm xlii. 1, 2.

analogies and comparisons more in unison with its deep sensibility, and is wont to employ language partaking of a hyperbolical character, in order to amplify to the utmost extent the sentiments which it is desirous of expressing. When such language springs out of real emotion, and is in keeping with the genuine feelings of the heart, it communicates to prayer a great accession of vigour, and is productive of a powerful effect. The case is however extremely different when metaphors, poetic imagery, and allegorical representations, are studiously sought for, in order to embellish and adorn the style of devotion. In this case they are as remote from good taste and chastity of style, as they are inconsistent with the gravity and reverence which ought ever to pervade all the parts of the worship of the most holy God.

Nothing can be more incongruous in itself, or more offensive to all persons of devout and cultivated minds, than an

endeavour to discover forms of speech, which, instead of being the enunciations of genuine feelings, are manifestly attempts to please the fancy, and gratify the imagination, by what merits no better a name than that of tinsel, and tawdry ornament. The most unadorned, and even homely style, is incomparably to be preferred. The rule to be chiefly observed is, to employ a style that is in close agreement with the actual feeling, chastened and subdued by the proprieties which belong to the nature of prayer, and not calculated to shock the sensibilities of the hearers by representations too lofty and excessive for them to sympathise with. There is also a great diversity of natural feeling and talent in different persons, which will tend to give a diversity of colouring to style; and if the genuine promptings of nature be pursued, governed and controlled by a strict regard to propriety, the greatest attainable excellency of style will be produced.

(2.) The style proper for prayer is direct; meaning, by this, a freedom from involution and complication. An involved and complicated style is, in the highest degree, unsuited to prayer, because it is the reverse of being clear, perspicuous, and easily intelligible; characteristics which ought to form the chief distinction of style, as they certainly constitute its greatest excellences. This holds true in every kind of composition; nothing can atone for the want of them, and they are especially indispensable to prayer. An involved style frequently arises from the want of clear perception, and thorough comprehension of the subject which occupies attention; it leads to a parenthetical mode of expression, in which sentences are left unfinished, interrupted, and broken by the intrusion of others, which succeed one another, until both the speaker and the hearers are bewildered in inextricable confusion. The use of lengthened sentences is apt to produce a tendency to this

obscurity of expression, and to promote the complication that ought to be assiduously shunned. Short and energetic sentences are greatly preferable; though an excess of them is inconvenient, as they assume the appearance of apothegms, and are likely to lead to an epigrammatic manner of expression, which suggests the notion of artificial contrivance and effort.

The general character of the short prayers that are contained in the book of Common Prayer partakes, perhaps, of as much excellence as any human production can be expected to attain in point of style. They are generally perspicuous and transparent; simple and direct; with as much vivacity as the sacredness of their purpose admits.

Intensity of design, united with a moderate share of self-possession, invigorated by a steady reference to the supreme importance of the engagement, will do much towards preventing the blemishes which too often adhere to style: at the

same time, the utmost care should be taken that self-possession does not degenerate into boldness and self-sufficiency, which are far from being in unison with the lowliness of mind which ought ever to communicate its impressions to all the exercises of devotion.

(3.) The style of prayer should be simple, in opposition to a reasoning or abstract manner. To pursue trains of reasoning is an exercise of mind for which comparatively few of the most pious worshippers are qualified; and they who are so will probably be the most dissatisfied with such a style of prayer. The business of devotion is an exercise more of the heart than of the head; the calling forth of due affections, by a sympathetic agreement of the hearers with the speaker, is the main object, as far as style is concerned, that is to be aimed at. Men do not expect to be particularly informed by the prayers with which they unite; this is not the appropriate design of

prayer, and to render it the vehicle of conveying information is an encroachment on the province of the preacher: preaching prayers are singularly wearisome, and they manifest an impropriety of which almost the least informed worshippers will be sensible. This style is not suited to any of the parts of prayer; and to employ it conveys the appearance of a wish to impart to the great Being whom we worship, something which it is necessary to prove to him. Prayer should be made up of the results of as much previous reasoning as you please; and the more knowledge any one possesses, so much the better, provided he also possesses the skill to use it wisely.

Prayer should ever be in harmony with the knowledge derived from the Scriptures, of religious truth, and duty; and the man who is distinguished by the largest share of such knowledge is the best qualified to introduce into his prayers the various and unnumbered topics with

which it will furnish him. Reasoning prayers, besides the manifest incongruities that have been noticed, will have a bad effect on the manner of him who delivers them, by rendering him cold, dry, and artificial, and thus weary the patience of those who are to follow him, because there is nothing to relieve the tedium which they produce. When the heart and the feelings can be wrought upon, and the spirit which animates the breast of the leader is propagated throughout the congregation, then, and then only, will the worship be interesting, and all become "of one heart and of one spirit."

(4.) The style adopted in prayer should be pure; pure, I mean, as contrasted with what is quaint, ludicrous, or irreverent. Some persons of great zeal and piety have been led into the improprieties consequent on such a style, by a frequent perusal of the writings of a former age, in which an antiquated style prevails, and

which they have been led to imitate on account of the intrinsic excellency of the writers, to whose works they have felt a strong degree of attachment. There are innumerable phrases employed in prayer derived from this source,—a sort of traditional style, that is propagated from one age to another. It would be extremely easy, and might not prove destitute of utility, were it not somewhat invidious, to point out many phrases and forms of expression, which, at the period of their origin, gave no offence, but which, at this time, are more likely to excite a smile, and to provoke censure, than to call forth any becoming sentiment. Persons of deep and ardent devotion will not allow such phraseology to be productive, in their minds, of its almost inevitable effects; but on the minds of the young, and especially of those who take but little interest in the most important objects of prayer, it has a very pernicious influence, by inducing them to ridicule the worthy

persons by whom it is uttered, and to confirm their prejudices, already too strong, against the most venerable truths of religion.

For reasons of a very similar kind, the indications of party feeling, whether religious or political, should be sedulously avoided. They can do no good; and will only gratify the vehement predilections of some parts of the congregation, and stir up the dislike and aversion of others. This is to take a most unfair advantage of the privilege of the pulpit; and to use such means of impressing favourite opinions, resembles too much the usages of those unhappy times, when

> "Pulpit, drum ecclesiastic
> Was beat with fist instead of a stick."

The devotional parts of public worship should be so conducted as to concentrate affection; to repress all the malignant and selfish passions, which have, alas! so deep roots in every bosom; to calm

all the perturbations of the heart, and to unite all in offering up to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, a sacrifice pure and unspotted, prompted by love to him, for his unspeakable love and condescension, and thoroughly imbued with the lowliness, meekness, and gentleness of Christ.

It speaks little for the wisdom or piety, to say nothing of the taste and discernment, of the leaders of public worship, when Christians of somewhat different parties, or names, accidentally or occasionally attend on their ministrations, and are disgusted rather than edified, by noticing improprieties of the kind to which I have adverted. Public prayer, in order to produce its best effects, must be serious and full of reverence, and afford to the witnesses of it most satisfying assurance of the sincerity, earnestness, and devotion of the minister, associated with those indications of good taste and good feeling which will at once conciliate

esteem, and excite devout and becoming sentiments.

But what is to be said of those unhappy cases, in which men of weak, arrogant, and self-sufficient minds, pour forth the almost profane and utterly revolting effusions of hearts imbued with enthusiastic chimeras, and swollen with the groundless notion of their own superiority over all other teachers and public leaders? What is to be thought, again, of men who can degrade the sacred institution of public prayer into an instrument for the display of bigotry, presumption, and ignorance, or who dare to render it a vehicle of low humour, of ridiculous conceits, or of vulgar tales? Decency recoils from the display, and true piety is ready to weep over the baneful prostitution! The practice, which is by no means, I fear, uncommon, of using prayer as a medium of fortifying fanatical misrepresentations of the gospel, and fostering a censorious and bitter temper among

the devotees of such teaching, is little, if at all, less reprehensible, and all conspire to bring into contempt the pure and sacred spirit of christian devotion.

Much of the prejudice that exists against free prayer, as the organ of public worship, and many of the objections that are made against it, are either directly caused, or greatly promoted, by the injudicious and unbecoming way in which it is sometimes performed; and surely no worthier object of attention can occupy the thoughts of those to whom the performance of it is entrusted, than to remove every accusation of this nature, and to do honour to the unprescribed methods of devotion, to which they have attached themselves.

3. I shall, in the next place, request attention to some brief remarks respecting the language which is best adapted to the purposes of public prayer. The characters of such language are clear, — chaste, — energetic, — and scriptural.

(1.) The language of prayer should be clear, that is, perspicuous. The perspicuity of language is closely allied to that of style; but the perspicuity of the style will be greatly aided by the clearness of the language. A selection of the most appropriate terms, and a fit collocation of them, contribute in the highest degree to the intelligibleness of the composition. Technical words, or terms of art, employed in systems of scholastic theology, are not conducive to the perspicuity, which is so requisite; they cast a great degree of obscurity upon the subject, and, if not thoroughly understood, serve only to perplex the attention of the hearers. It is neither practicable nor desirable for the great majority of christian worshippers to be versed in systematic terms, and to have so full a comprehension of their meaning as at once to discriminate it. A very large proportion of every congregation consists of persons whose literary or scientific attainments are inconsiderable,

and who cannot be supposed to take any interest in prayer, where numbers of words are introduced which they do not understand. Metaphysical and abstract terms should be avoided, as being still more unfit vehicles of devotion for plain persons of good common sense, but who are little acquainted with scientific and philosophical pursuits. The supreme object of those who lead the devotions of others should unquestionably be, in relation to language, to render the whole so clear and intelligible, that persons of even but small attainments should experience no difficulty in understanding it. As well nearly might a service be conducted in a foreign language as to be stuffed with technical, abstract, and unintelligible terms, not one of which ought to have any place in prayer, or to injure the clearness and perspicuity of the service.

(2.) The language of prayer should be chaste. By this characteristic I mean, that low, vulgar, and insignificant words

should be excluded from prayer. There may, doubtless, be many persons, in each congregation of worshippers, to whom such terms are not very objectionable, as their reading and general converse in the society to which they belong do not impart to them much sensibility on such things; but there are also many others whose taste is more refined and cultivated, and they are, therefore, likely to be disgusted with language of such a kind. It may seem to the uneducated a very trivial matter; but there is scarcely any impropriety in public worship that is more likely to create and perpetuate dislike in the minds of those who belong to a superior class. Such words contribute nothing to the clearness and perspicuity of language, as there is, happily, in the dialect used by Englishmen, no deficiency of terms to denote with clearness, the sentiments that are to be conveyed, without involving the employment of words such as those to which I allude. It would be a great

happiness, on very many accounts, if the persons to whom the conducting of public and social devotion is committed, were so well instructed by reading, reflection, and good sense, as to become incapable of the improprieties that have now been noticed: and certainly it is no difficult task to enjoin on them, that they should endeavour to make up the deficiencies which more early days, and less favourable pursuits, may have occasioned in relation to such engagements. Much improvement might be derived, in no long time, by attention to the subject, and the use of the most suitable means. It may well be expected also, that all who voluntarily discharge such an office, will feel so much concerned for the honour and respectability of their profession, as to induce a careful employment of them.

(3.) All turgid and bombastic language ought for ever to be separated from the exercise of prayer. Some persons of little taste, or force of mind, but of warm

imagination and vitiated perception, endeavour, by expedients of this kind, to impart dignity and energy to their efforts. But the attempt is fruitless, and can succeed only with those whose approbation is least worthy to be coveted. Genuine force and energy of expression are quite consistent with the employment of plain and unostentatious words. A redundancy of epithets serves only to evince poverty of thought, and to obscure the little that there really is, by words that are either synonymous or insignificant. The class of hearers lowest in intelligence may be seduced by the magniloquent sounds which they hear, and imagine that the persons who use them must be of a superior order, and distinguished by elevated attainments. They will esteem the display to be grand and imposing; while the wiser, and better informed, will justly regard such expressions as the resources by which feeble minds seek to conceal their deficiencies, and to dazzle the vain

and superficial among their hearers. There is no book superior to the Bible in force, energy, and magnificence; none more remote from the great swelling words of vanity, to which some persons assign the palm for eloquence and sublimity.

(4.) The last observation which I shall make in relation to the language of prayer is, that it should be scriptural. By this I do not mean to suggest that prayer should consist wholly, or very much, of exact quotations from the sacred volume. This would become wearisome, and would be regarded as an unbecoming substitute for language and sentiment, in unison with the genius of the Bible; but which should be so elaborated by the mind of the speaker, as to show that his thoughts have been conversant with the Scriptures, and have, to use a significant metaphor, so digested them, as to diffuse their ingredients, in a form almost impalpable, throughout the whole substance of prayer. Such select portions of the Scriptures as are most

plain and expressive, may, with great advantage, be so incorporated with the language of prayer as to form a continuity with it: in which case it is, however, proper to adhere to the exact phraseology of the sacred book. Nothing communicates greater authority to prayer, than the skilful insertion into it of such appropriate portions of Scripture, provided they do not occur with too great frequency.

There is, however, a very injudicious use of scriptural language sometimes adopted, which lowers and debases both the substance and the expression of prayer. The Bible, especially the Old Testament, abounds with metaphors, figures, allegorical and proverbial forms of speech, which were adapted to the Jewish nation; many of them derived from the instituted worship that was in use among them, and many others, which were suited to a people of gross habits, without refinement, or the ornaments of literary and polished communication, but which are

quite inappropriate to a mode of worship essentially different, and to persons whose mental habits, associations, and tastes, have been formed in a purer age, and among more cultivated manners. It is very practicable so to employ scriptural language in prayer, as to make it grotesque, ridiculous, and even the medium of conveyance for expressions that violate the sanctity of devotional sentiment and feeling.

4. A few remarks relative to what may be styled the method of prayer, will include all I wish to comprehend in this chapter.

By the method of prayer I mean such particulars as the voice, gesture, and general demeanour, which are most agreeable to it, and most likely to give it its fullest effect.

(1.) The voice. I may say, with regard to this, that it should be so modulated as to be easily heard by those who listen; and that it should not greatly exceed what

is requisite for this purpose. It is evident that if it be not distinctly heard, the listeners cannot agreeably unite in the service; and if it be raised to a height beyond what is suited to this purpose, it will be unbecoming the solemn propriety of the occasion. A noisy, vehement, and exclamatory mode of uttering requests to God, seems to imply, that earnestness and pathos can be best produced by such means. The truth is, that nothing is more remote from the reality of such feeling, than a vociferous mode of address, and it is likely to impart the notion rather of impatience than of humble solicitude. A good deal undoubtedly depends, in this particular, upon the possession of an agreeable natural voice; yet much may be done to aid in the absence of such a faculty. A clear, distinct enunciation, equally removed from drawling slowness, and cluttered rapidity of utterance, is the object chiefly to be aimed at. The utmost care should be taken to avoid all unna-

tural tones, as these have a strong tendency to provoke ridicule, while every effort should be directed to the attainment of a serious, natural, and earnest expression of sentiment. A cold, heartless, and uninteresting manner, is too likely to suggest the notion of indifference and inattention, and to diffuse the same improprieties among the hearers.

(2.) Little needs be said concerning gesture, besides remarking that it should be in unison with the calmness and gravity of utterance. Nothing boisterous and extravagant should be permitted: and if any movements of the limbs be thought expedient, they should be restrained within narrow bounds. "Let all things be done decently, and in order," supplies the general rule that should govern this, and all the circumstances attendant on the performance of public devotion.

Before I entirely conclude the consideration of the most becoming manner in which public and social devotion may be

conducted, I solicit attention to a few remarks relative to the most effectual means of securing the improvements that have been suggested. I shall, therefore,

5. Observe that a continually increasing acquaintance with the real sense of the holy Scriptures,—a constant perusal of the books best adapted to improve the style, and cultivate the heart and judgment,—and the occasional composition of written prayers,—will, each of them, contribute greatly to the important end.

(1.) A continually increasing acquaintance with the real sense of the holy Scriptures will confer great advantage, towards the fittest manner of discharging the duty of prayer. The remarks which I have to offer on this topic are most appropriate to ministers, whose stated employment it is to take the lead in such exercises. In submitting these remarks, I wish to be understood as speaking chiefly, if not exclusively, to my younger brethren in the sacred office, and to those studious young

men who are preparing to engage in it. Similar means of improvement may be advantageously, though not so extensively employed, by those active members of our churches, who usually conduct the private exercises of social devotion, as it is exceedingly desirable that such engagements should be carried on with a strict attention to truth and propriety.

Every one who embarks in the ministry of the gospel, brings himself under a special obligation to use his utmost powers to qualify himself for the best and most useful discharge of the duties that devolve upon him. The great facilities that later years have provided for the successful cultivation of the knowledge of the sacred writings, imposes an increased obligation to employ them vigorously for the important purpose. It would be an indelible reproach to any minister who has enjoyed the means of becoming acquainted with the extensive apparatus for an accurate and successful

study of the sacred writings, which now presents itself to him, to undervalue and neglect it. The capacity of perusing these sacred books in the languages in which they were originally written is an advantage that cannot be too highly estimated, or too sedulously improved; nor can any thing be more conducive to the reputation and honour of a christian minister, than so to employ it, as that his "profiting may appear unto all."

It is not by any means an uncommon occurrence to hear various expressions used in prayer which manifestly show that the passages of Scripture which are cited in them, or made applicable to them, are not properly understood by those who use them. This is inflicting an injury upon the less-informed hearer, as he is thus led to form erroneous conceptions of many important portions of the Bible; while it reflects no small degree of discredit upon the industry and discernment of the person who uses

such phraseology. Certainly no words should be introduced into prayer, no portions of Scripture quoted, no systematic or traditional forms of speech employed, of which the speaker has not a clear and precise understanding, as it is impossible for him to communicate to others what he himself does not possess. If he neglect this rule, he will incur the blame of "darkening counsel by words without knowledge." There is an employment of scriptural phraseology which becomes quaint, obscure, and scarcely intelligible, for want of attention to the rule now suggested. Technical phrases or scholastic expressions should, as much as possible, be excluded from devotional exercises, as they tend only to darken and mystify the sense, which might easily be conveyed by more intelligible forms of speech. A continual attention to such subjects, which are not by any means trivial, or unworthy the notice of those who are most conversant with public

prayer, will amply repay the labour expended upon it, by an augmented capacity of performing this duty with pleasure and utility, accompanied by the consciousness of having neglected no means of contributing both to the piety and intelligence of those over whom, and for whose benefit, the pastoral office was appointed.

(2.) A constant perusal of the books best adapted to improve the style, and cultivate the heart and judgment, will prove of great service, in contributing to the most useful discharge of public devotion.

Such reading cannot fail to be accompanied by an increase of knowledge; while it will imperceptibly purify the taste, and communicate stores adapted to promote fulness of thought and readiness of correct expression. It will give richness to what without it must be poor; and beauty to what must otherwise be deformed and unsightly. It will afford means of gratifying the most intel-

ligent and cultivated hearers; while it will insensibly operate upon the minds of those who possess fewer advantages, and whose previous associations may have been productive of an approbation of far less appropriate and beneficial modes of performing this office.

(3.) The last instrument of improvement to which I shall advert is applicable, almost solely, to younger ministers and students: it is, to accustom themselves, especially at the commencement of their course, to the occasional composition of written prayers. My opinion is not that such forms should be actually employed, either by committing them to memory, or delivering them from the manuscript; but that they should be confined solely to personal improvement. It has already been observed, that much labour and pains are expended on the composition of sermons and public discourses, but probably few or no efforts are made for improving the faculty of

devotion. There is surely little reason why such a distinction should be made, and I am fully assured that attention to such means would largely repay any application of time and effort to it.

I have now arrived at the termination of the observations which occur to me as most appropriate to the purpose for which these pages have been written: but I am unwilling to conclude my little book without occupying a few more pages on the subject of the blessed consequences which will assuredly follow the exercise of all genuine devotion: to this purpose I shall dedicate an additional and concluding chapter.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE CONSEQUENCES OF PRAYER.

It is truly said, that "the end crowns the whole: *finis coronat opus*." In the instance which now engages our attention, the end is—"eternal life." The "inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away," is the certain consequence of sincere and scriptural devotion. After what has been presented to my readers, it would, I trust, be superfluous for me to say, that this consequence does not follow as the measure of human desert, but as the sole result of a Divine constitution, which

overflows with benignity and grace. Nothing short of total ignorance, both of the unrivalled sovereignty and independence of God, and of the immutable obligation that rests upon every intelligent creature to render obedience to his will, even though there were no hope of recompense, can foster the absurdity, that God is in any possible degree indebted to man. "When ye have done all that is commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants," is as agreeable to the conclusions of reason as it is to the dictates of revelation.

I freely acknowledge, that if our acquaintance with religion extended no further than to this demonstrable truth, we should be in a condition most disconsolate: the sinews of exertion would be severed; and the hopelessness of our state would deprive us of spirit and energy to proceed in the course of strict and unswerving duty: but we are not abandoned to this cheerless prospect. The

blessed gospel has brought "life and immortality to light," and provided the most persuasive inducements to continue "instant in prayer" to the end. I shall therefore hope for the willing concurrence of my readers, while I apply myself to a distinct and comprehensive representation of the consequences of devotion. This duty is not unaccompanied by very attractive results, in the present state of existence; but as these have been in some measure anticipated in the preceding chapters, I shall confine myself, at present, to a contemplation of the ends of it, which belong to our future being.

The season of death is so closely allied to our future existence, that a few remarks on the influence of devotion over those moments of our final removal from all present scenes and engagements, may not be considered as foreign from the purpose of this chapter. I shall therefore appropriate this concluding part of my undertaking to a consideration

of the influence which devotion has upon the feelings and views during the immediate approach of death, and an enumeration of some of the most important instances in which it will have an influence over the future condition of all truly upright and devotional Christians.

I. Devotion will have an influence upon the feelings and views during the immediate approach of death.

What will be the degree in which our mental powers will act, when we are immediately advancing to the termination of life, is beyond our ability to determine with any certainty, because these degrees are so different in different cases. On some occasions, the exercise of the faculties of the mind is either greatly interrupted, or entirely suspended, by the operations of disease; on other occasions, the disease which is reducing the body to the dust leaves to the mind the full use of its powers; and in not a few instances, the mental faculties are more than usually

clear and active. These variations in the state of the mind immediately prior to the dissolution of the body, render it impossible for us to ascertain what will be our own actual condition at that solemn period. We must, therefore, proceed on the presumption that it will be that which is most commonly experienced,—a state in which the soul, though greatly affected by the circumstances of the body, is still able to survey the past, and form anticipations of the future.

My thoughtful readers will more fully conceive than I can express the wide difference which, at the period of death, will be found between those who have employed themselves, during a large part of the progress of life, in the exercise of sincere and scriptural devotion; and those who have either altogether neglected it, or have performed it in a manner that is unacceptable to the great Object of it. It is saying but little that in the latter cases distressing fears, alarming appre-

hensions or presumptuous hopes, and unreasonable confidence, are experienced: and in the former, peace of conscience, joyful expectations, founded on reasonable grounds, which have been closely examined, and a satisfying dependence on the power and grace of Him who "has the keys of death, and of the invisible world," take and keep possession of the soul. The consciousness of having offered up unnumbered sincere and fervent supplications during the progress of life, supports the spirit in looking on its condition as free from danger, because they have been both the results of its faith in the gospel, and the means of enabling it to attain a victory over numerous and long-continued trials. The contest may have been long and severe, the issue often apparently doubtful, the hopes nearly exhausted; but now the prospect brightens, the clouds disperse, and the light of the Sun of Righteousness bursts forth, not unfrequently, with more than wonted splendour.

The soul, now arrived at the confines of the celestial world, yields itself up without restraint to grateful recollections of the past; and gathering all its surviving energies, is ready to exclaim, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace; for my eyes have seen thy salvation." Lowly acknowledgments of guilt and infirmity are associated with vivid expressions of Divine interference, and unmerited support and preservation. "Once," will the departing Christian say, "I was wandering in forbidden paths, forsaking the fountain of living waters, and hewing out for myself broken cisterns that could hold no water: I was walking after the desire of my eyes, and the vanity of my heart; but a hand, of which I was unconscious, was laid upon me; an invisible, but effectual agency turned me from the destructive course; and the same almighty arm that has sustained me all the way, now holds me up, and ministers to me its unfailing support. 'The

Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, he leadeth me beside the still waters. Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.'

"I am now standing on the margin of that river which has often filled me with dread, and am ready to launch upon that ocean, the contemplation of which has frequently almost overwhelmed me: but I hear a voice now directed to me, 'Fear not, for I have redeemed thee; I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy one of Israel, thy Saviour.'* Amidst the transient scenes of life I have

* Isaiah xliii. 1, 2.

witnessed many a dark and distressing day: I have been burdened with loads of grief, from the pressure of which I could discern no method of escape. I have been well nigh swept away by the storms that have blown upon me; and I have exclaimed in the agonies of despondency, 'Lord, save me, I perish.' Yet now I am conducted by the skill and power of the blessed Redeemer, just close to the abodes of rest and undecaying felicity. I shall see his face, I shall hear his voice, he will welcome me to his kingdom, he will lead me to fountains of living water, and God will wipe away all tears from my eyes.

"Hitherto my course has been often devious and uncertain. I have been the victim of temptation; unbelieving suggestions have too often deprived me of courage and energy, and I have given up all for lost. But I am on the point of escaping from all such trials and all such fears: I shall no more be buffeted by the adverse blasts that have blown upon me;

no more shall my frail heart wander from its 'chief and exceeding joy;' no more shall I be perplexed by ignorance, or tossed about with doubt; I shall now 'see as I am seen, and know even as I am known.'"

It is far from my intention to say that such sentiments are universally experienced at the approach of death, by persons who have earnestly and effectually cultivated the spirit of true devotion. Many of them spend their days in inward conflicts and outward trials: nor is it the dispensation of Heaven to remove, even at last, the pressure that weighs upon their spirits. Multitudes, I doubt not, whose departure from the world has been clouded with mental or corporeal disease; whose spirits have been depressed by prevailing fears; and whose forebodings have been only gloomy and disastrous; have been safely conducted to the mansions of rest. But I speak of what may be hoped for; of the natural consequences of unfeigned

devotion; and of the expectations which we may humbly entertain, while resisting the inducements which may be presented to us, to give up the practice of prayer, and relinquish the combat to which we are called. God alone is the giver of consolation; and he imparts it to such persons, and in such measures, as his unsearchable wisdom determines. But of this we have the fullest assurance, that if we live without prayer we shall die without hope. It may be, that if we persevere in devotion, a "joy unspeakable and full of glory" shall gild our last moments: but should the event prove different, our safety is secure; and the arms of Omnipotence will be thrown around us, though we may not be permitted to feel their actual embrace.

O deluded and unhappy mortals, who are trifling away, in the pursuit of earthly bliss and the gratifications of sense and fancy, the precious moments that are still prolonged! O think, what will be your

feelings, when, prostrate on the bed of death, you will perceive that you are just entering a state for which you have made no preparation; and are about to appear before your Creator and Sovereign, with whom you have formed no acquaintance, whose condescending invitations you have slighted, at whose threatenings you have scoffed, and with whom you have refused to converse! However busy you may be, in whatever important or pleasing occupation your days may be passing away, you know the last of them is approaching; you cannot, you dare not flatter yourselves with the hope of exemption from the doom which destines you to become the victims of the king of terrors: will you not then say, "Turn thou me, and I shall be turned, for thou art the Lord my God?"

II. We come now to the considerations that strictly belong to our future existence, and to the consequences which devotion has upon it.

1. The first of these to which I shall

advert relates to the formation of character, which will not be interrupted, but advanced, in its progress towards perfection by the event of death.

Every human being that passes through the gates of death, at adult years, has a character peculiar to himself: it has been gradually forming under the influence of the state of probation or discipline to which it has been subjected; and we have the surest reason for expecting, that the distinctive character of each individual will adhere to him, subsequently to his departure from this world, and become the germ of his future intellectual maturity. That this is a just conclusion, we have the authority of the Scriptures to plead: "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still."*

* Rev. xxii. 11.

A consideration full of fearful presage offers itself in this passage to the irreligious and indevout. But I shall not attempt to delineate it; the more pleasing employment of tracing the future destiny of the pious, when they shall have finished their present course, attracts our attention. It is entirely inconsistent with the nature of the human soul, to suppose that its future condition of happiness will result from its being inactive and stationary: we are, on the contrary, led to expect, from what we know of it now, that its activity will be increased, and its progress towards perfection accelerated. The exemplar which will then be placed before it is, indeed, the same that it is now instructed to copy; but the circumstances in which the pursuit of intellectual and moral perfection will hereafter be carried on, are as superior to those that here surround us as heaven is to earth. The scene which the invisible world will disclose to a pious and sincere disciple

of Jesus Christ, is one in which every possible advantage will be enjoyed for imitating the perfection of his Maker; and we can form no conception more satisfying and full of glory, than that eternity will be employed in a never-ending approximation to that all-perfect Being. What a surprising difference the passing of a few years can make in the intellectual endowments of the soul, we perceive from contrasting its state in infancy with the maturity of its later days. Forty or fifty years afforded sufficient space for the nascent powers of mind to evolve themselves in the consummate proficiency of Bacon and Newton; what advancement may not, then, be expected from the lapse of a thousand centuries, passed amidst the bright effulgence of uncreated intelligence and holiness? Yet eternity will then be but at its commencement, and the glory of the Deity but beginning to be disclosed.

"O scenes surpassing fable, and yet true!"

We are unable to form an exact notion of the proficiency that will be attained, or of the exquisitely adapted means by which the attainment is to be made. The prospect is too vast for our feeble vision to discern with any clearness, enveloped too as we are in the misty and obscure medium of sensible perception. The intimations of revelation are too brief, and conceived in too general terms, to communicate any very exact and comprehensible notions: yet they speak of "seeing God as he is;" of "seeing as we are seen, and knowing as we are known." "Now we see" as if we contemplated the future condition of the soul by means of enigmatical forms depicted in a mirror,* but "then we shall see face to face." These, and similar expressions of the holy Scriptures, clearly sustain the statement that I have attempted to deduce from them.

* Βλέπομεν γὰρ ἄρτι δι' ἐσόπτρου ἐν αἰνίγματι.—1 Cor. xiii. 12.

Perhaps we may be able, by attentive meditation, to bring these scenes a little closer to our view, and sketch something like a detail of more definite particulars. What will be the nature of the precise change that death will produce upon the soul we cannot determine; we can say nothing of the augmented capacity of a disembodied spirit; and we are equally ignorant of the effects that will take place from the reunion of the soul with the body, defecated and refined from the dregs by which, in its present state of humiliation,* it is polluted and enfeebled. We certainly have no reason to think that the immediate effect of death will be to produce any suspension of the active powers of the mind. If God be "the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God not of the dead, but of the living," then these distinguished men are not now in a condition inferior to that in which they existed

* Τὸ σῶμα τῆς ταπεινώσεως ἡμῶν.—Philip. iii. 21.

while they were the inhabitants of the earth, but are in a state corresponding with the honour and truth of Him "who is not ashamed to be called their God," and who "hath provided for them a city." It is most reasonable, and the converse altogether improbable, that Abraham, with his illustrious son and grandson, is now possessed of unimaginable degrees of perfection beyond any to which they had advanced in this life.

The means by which this advancement has been effected we may conclude to be the same in nature, with those which will be granted to all who, like them, have glorified God by their faith and obedience. We shall be in no danger of losing ourselves in groundless conjectures and uncertain guesses, if we say, that disembodied spirits, on entering the invisible world, arrive at a full certainty of their everlasting happiness,—that they have a clear perception of the visible glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ,—that they acquire a very

enlarged acquaintance with the pursuits that will for ever engage their attention, and extend their felicity,—and that they are liberated from the dangerous impediments to moral, intellectual, and religious improvement, to which they were exposed, during their pilgrimage through this scene of temptation.

(1.) Disembodied spirits, on entering the invisible world, arrive at a full certainty of their everlasting happiness.

During the period of their continuance on earth, the light by which their progress was directed was that of faith: "We walk by faith, and not by sight." The light which faith sheds upon the christian path is, at best, extremely inferior to the evidence of sense and sight. Many causes concur to render it variable and inconstant, but no variation can arise when the objects of its perception are visibly set before the mind, and are actually in its possession. No room is left for doubt or suspicion, but entire certainty takes place

of the defective evidence which formerly cast a glimmering ray upon the path. But who will undertake to say what joy will then enter the heart, what ecstasy of delight will pervade the spirit, when every doubt is removed, and every fear subdued, never again to ruffle the tranquil bosom? The great question is now decided; the triumph is complete; the soul looks back on its past trials, and they are seen to be light and momentary; it looks forward, and embraces "the exceeding and eternal weight of glory" that has now succeeded. How blessed to be in an instant set at liberty from all that is anxious and perplexing, to have every hope realized, and every anticipation of faith and devout aspiration accomplished!

(2.) Departed spirits have a distinct perception of the visible glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. God dwells in "light that is inaccessible; to Him hath no man approached; Him no man can see." The essence of the Deity must,

in all probability, remain for ever invisible, as it may be concluded that no endowments, however great, can elevate a creature to an eminence sufficiently high to enable it to gaze on that nature which is essentially immense and infinite. But Jesus Christ is "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person"; "in him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." So perfect is the resemblance, and so entire the communication, that Christ declares, "Whoever hath seen me, hath seen the Father." For the purpose of displaying the divine glory to created natures, the Son became incarnate, and men "beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth," when it was partially obscured by the tabernacle of flesh and blood in which it dwelt.

But the veil is now withdrawn; the rising Saviour dropped the gross vehicle of flesh, when he ascended from the earth, and assumed the spiritual body in which

he took possession of the reins of universal dominion. Into his immediate presence death conveys his departing disciples; he takes them to dwell with himself, where they shall see his glory, and where he "will wipe away all tears from their eyes." Devotion will then have completed its greatest purpose: it has gradually moulded the spirit on earth into a distant resemblance to Him who is "the first-born among many brethren;" it will then be perfected, and take possession of every thought, and fill every power of the mind with sublime and ineffable delight. In the visible manifestation which will thus be set before the disembodied spirit, of the universal dominion of the exalted Redeemer, it will witness its own security, and the saying will come upon it with the fullest expression, "Because I live, ye shall live also."

(3.) Disembodied spirits will acquire a very enlarged acquaintance with the pursuits that are for ever to engage their

attention and extend their felicity. Of these pursuits there is little known while earthly objects press upon the senses, and intercept the view of the mind. They are among the "things which the eye has not seen, of which the ear has not heard, and which have never entered into the heart of man, but which God has prepared for them that love him." By what new medium of intelligence these objects will be rendered visible we know not. We can, indeed, easily conceive that an unimaginable accession of knowledge might accrue from an additional sense being imparted to us, in our present state of being. Difficulties that are now insoluble might at once be explained, and truths unthought of might disclose themselves to the enraptured mind. Something analogous to this, we may safely conclude, will take place when the light of heaven shall be diffused around the spirit, and the essences and forms of unknown objects of satisfaction shall be revealed.

Then will the spirit drink, not of the fabled Lethe, but of the river of the paradise of God; and then will the fruit of the tree of life no longer be prohibited by the flaming sword of the celestial cherubim; a free access to it will be afforded, and its sovereign efficacy will be felt in banishing every want, and gratifying every desire.

(4.) The spirits of the truly devout will find themselves liberated from the dangerous impediments to moral, intellectual, and religious improvement, to which they are ever exposed during their pilgrimage through this scene of temptation.

On earth almost every pleasure is combined with pain, and no delight can be safely embraced without a recollection of the evil that may possibly prove to be its consequence. On this account, vigilance, caution, and self-denial, are rendered indispensable. These states of the mind are, however, inconsistent, by their very nature, with perfect enjoyment and

unalloyed satisfaction; they are the duties of a militant course. It is not until the conflict is terminated, the victory achieved, and every enemy subdued, that the patient warrior lays aside his armour and his weapons, and invests himself in the attire of a peaceful citizen. So the human soul, in its earthly abode, is ever harassed by the incursions of insidious and unremitting adversaries; to relax exertion is to invite attack; to slumber in security is to ensure a total defeat. The loins must be ever girt, and patience must have its perfect work; but the liberated soul, at the instant of emancipation, will feel that danger and trial have passed away, never to return. Enjoyment succeeds to exertion, triumph to conflict, and on entering the serene atmosphere of the celestial world, sorrow and sighing, watchfulness and care, will take their final adieu. "In righteousness shalt thou be established; thou shalt be far from oppression, for thou shalt not fear;

and from terror, for it shall not come near thee."*

Such, we may assuredly conclude, will be the delightful sensations of a spirit that passes from earth to heaven; and such the high and holy recompense to which the practice of unfeigned devotion is conducting all who are assiduously engaged in it.

2. In attempting to assign the consequences of devotion that will take place in the future existence of good men, we may notice the information that will then be disclosed respecting the answers with which their prayers have been met.

This is frequently an anxious topic in the present state. The will of God often requires long patience respecting it. He has, indeed, pledged his word, that if men ask in faith and sincerity they shall receive; but he has confined himself to no limits of time, or place, or circumstances,

* Isa. liv. 14.

in which the blessing shall be conferred. He demands that we bow to his wisdom and wait his pleasure. In many cases, effects the apparently reverse of those which are sought for seem to take place; and speaking generally, the answers to prayer are far from being easily discernible in the present world. That "hope deferred makes the heart sick," is an observation many times verified in experience; and it becomes, not unfrequently, a very painful exercise of faith and patience, to have the fulfilment of prayers which spring from earnest desire long delayed. It naturally tends to induce fear that there is something wrong in the objects or manner of prayer; it is far also from being uncommon to find distrust of the faithfulness and truth of God insinuating itself from this circumstance into the heart, nor is it by any means impossible for suspicions to fasten themselves upon the thought, that the Most High regards not the supplications of men.

Nothing is more apparent in all these cases than that the trial of faith and the probation of patience are produced by them; but it is the observer who is at ease that draws this conclusion; the spirit that is itself the subject of trial is unable to discern, with any clearness, that such is the case, and is rather inclined to draw the disconsolate conclusion, that it is a stranger to the genuine sentiments of religion, and far from being an object of the Divine favour and care. Could this latter difficulty be removed, by an assurance that the individual is really interested in the patronage of Heaven, the exercise of patience would become comparatively easy, but this doubt spreads over the heart the deepest gloom, and fills it with melancholy and terrifying apprehensions.

The instances also in which no peculiar pressure of this nature is experienced are far from being few, where earnest and long continued desires, apparently unaccomplished, leave a great degree of

anxious uncertainty respecting their ever being accomplished. The objects of desire may appear to be every way unexceptionable, and in harmony with the instructions that God has given, respecting the blessings which it is permitted to men to hope for; and yet day after day passes, and year succeeds to year, but no notice seems to be taken of the reiterated supplications that are made. They only who have experienced the anguish resulting from long expected benefits that are withholden, are proper judges of the severity of the conflict which is thus produced and perpetuated. Numerous instances in point are recorded in the Book of Psalms; and from this cause that book is, perhaps, more highly prized by the majority of Christians than any other in the volume of inspiration. In it are found the most poignant expressions of grief and sadness, mingled with pathetic descriptions of painful and anxious apprehensions, while numberless suggestions are scattered

throughout that tend to afford refreshment to the weary spirit, and induce a never failing confidence in the sure mercy and truth of God. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him, for the help of his countenance."

In such a course, chequered by alternate fears and hopes, the most common lot of the pious and devout consists: at one hour, perhaps, the clouds part, and the light beams forth; the next, the darkness is accumulated, as though it would prove to be entire and final. This varied scene is, however, to terminate with the present state; and what the upright, though oftentimes depressed worshippers of God know not now, they will hereafter be made acquainted with.

The state of things which will open on the disembodied spirit, when it passes into its eternal rest, will be free from all perturbations and anxious cares.

Then the dark and louring clouds will have been for ever dissipated, and the pure radiance of heaven abide settled and serene without a momentary obscuration. No sooner shall the emancipated spirit ascend to its celestial abode, than it will reap ample information on all the topics which were so often the occasions of pathetic complaint and mournful soliloquy. The veil which covered the Divine procedure will be withdrawn, and the most satisfying assurances given that no neglect, no abandonment, had ever taken place; that no request had failed to enter into the holy place, or to penetrate to the audience of the eternal King. The contexture of Providence will be minutely displayed, and the ways by which the earnest solicitations of faith were answered clearly shown. "It shall be said in that day, Lo! this is our God, we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord, we have waited for him; we will be glad, and rejoice in his salvation."

That such a developement will cause the soul to overflow with delight, and transport, and thankfulness, may easily be conceived: but human thoughts have no line by which they may measure the depths of that ocean of eternal satisfaction; no rule by which to estimate the glorious results of devotion, to which so imperfect an allusion has now been made.

3. A future consequence of devotion will be, the full gratification of those desires of friendship and intercourse with God which gave energy to it during the season of life.

The identity of the soul, throughout its entire existence, affords an undeniable proof, that its distinguishing characters, equally with its essential faculties, will undergo no such change at death as either to destroy, or so to modify them as that they will not continue substantially the same that they now are. They will be elevated and expanded in an unknown

degree; but the soul that has lived on earth will be the same with that which will live in heaven, when innumerable ages shall have passed away. Whatever, therefore, have been the predominant desires of the heart, the desires that have, in fact, constituted the moral and religious character on earth, will abide and remain unaltered by the dissolution of the body. It is worthy of observation, that the gratification of such desires is the chief constituent of all happiness; as a man is not made happy by any endowments or possessions for which he has no desire, but may be exquisitely wretched, though encompassed by multifarious objects that impart to others the highest degree of enjoyment, because they are in unison with their desires.

The distinguishing feature of a character truly pious and devout is, its desire to know more intimately the glorious Author of all existence; to be more thoroughly assured of the possession of

his favour and friendship; and to enjoy a fuller and more perfect intercourse with him. "There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased."* The presence of this desire is the criterion of real religion. It is the love of God in the soul which leads it to take up its rest in him, and to derive its utmost joy and complacency from the consideration of his all-sufficient and eternal nature. All other parts of religion are subsidiary to this; and the gospel itself, with its amazing discoveries of forgiveness and acceptance through the mediation of the Son of God, is but the instrument of giving existence and satisfaction to this

* Psalm iv. 6, 7.—I would read the latter verse thus:—"Thou hast put more gladness into my heart, than (they enjoy) when their corn and their wine increase."

desire, which is the supreme perfection of religion, and its ultimate end.

The purpose for which the constitution of Christianity was formed, and for the accomplishment of which the government of the world was placed in the hands of our Lord and Redeemer, is to effect an indissoluble union of affection and blessedness between the infinite Creator and all the true disciples of his Son. "Neither," said our Saviour, immediately before his sufferings, "pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word: that they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us:"—"and the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them as thou hast loved me."*

* John xvii. 20—23.

The declarations of the Scriptures reach even further, and announce the extension of this union, so as to comprehend all the holy intelligences that are found throughout the universe. "That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth."* From such announcements of the final purposes of Divine government, it follows that no objects of desire can be comparable to these, and that the existence of earnest desire to obtain a share in them must be the highest consummation of religion in the soul of man, and the actual demonstration of a true and living faith. Every Christian is prompted by desire of this nature to the exercise of unremitting and earnest devotion. When the energy of devotion is subsiding, a recurrence of this desire imparts fresh vigour to it; it con-

* Ephes. i. 10.

stitutes the sacred fire at which the expiring flame is fed with new warmth and lustre; and it adds wings to the spirit, by which it soars beyond this gross atmosphere, and holds converse with Him, "in whose presence there is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

Every Christian, however, feels that in this condition of mortality he is exposed to the influence of innumerable fears and trials, which too often obscure his prospects and interrupt his satisfaction, so that he is continually reminded that this is not his resting-place or his home—that it is not the peaceful region in which he expects to enjoy the unclouded emanation of Divine and undecaying joy: he therefore gladly anticipates the end; he reaches forward to the day when trial will cease and victory will be consummated. But who shall describe the unutterable satisfaction that will fill his bosom when his disembodied spirit shall enter

into the paradise of God? He will then attain the utmost objects of his desire. A full and sensible assurance that he is an heir of God, a joint heir with Christ, will for ever banish fear and apprehension from his heart; a perfect and intimate intercourse with God will be for ever established; and all the resources of creative power, all the wondrous constitutions and arrangements of Providence, and all the riches of Divine grace and love, will become the means of his endless improvement in the knowledge and enjoyment of the immense and everlasting God.

4. The last consequence of devotion to which I shall advert, is the satisfaction that will arise from meeting with those with whom, and for whom, we have prayed, during our pilgrimage on earth.

The mention of this consequence of devotion can scarcely be made without exciting a sensation of delight, though it is not improbable that some of my

readers may be disposed to inquire if it be quite certain that those persons who have been united in christian acquaintance and friendship on earth, will renew their intercourse in heaven? The affirmative of this question appears to me to be so evident, that I should scarcely have thought it requisite to suggest the reasons which render it credible, had I not known that it does not appear to be so manifest to some thoughtful and considerate persons. We possess, it is true, but little precise information respecting the particular parts of which the happiness of the heavenly state will consist; but this is one on which it seems to me there is little room for doubt or hesitation. The contrary opinion is, I think, quite unreasonable, and entirely inconsistent with the brief though expressive hints that are contained in the Scriptures in relation to this subject.

I. It is, I think, unreasonable to suppose that the pious persons who have

been united in friendship and devotion on earth will have no knowledge of each other in the future state of happiness.

1. It is certain that there will be found in the future assemblage of good men an extensive acquaintance with one another. Every thing which the Scriptures intimate to us on this subject goes upon this supposition. They are to compose one body and one family, actuated by similar feelings of love and kindness; without acquaintance this cannot take place, as there will be, on this supposition, no objects on which the affections can rest. But if such an acquaintance will exist, I am quite at a loss to discover why it should not comprehend especially those between whom such sentiments have been formed, and very greatly matured upon earth: for,

2. Much of the religious pleasure and enjoyment experienced in the present state arises from the intimate knowledge which good men have of each other, and

the consequent attachments which spring from their mutual participation in the same devout and holy sentiments. Analogy, therefore, leads to the supposition that this, which forms so large a source of enjoyment here, will yield at least an equal share in the felicity of the future world. Indeed we are at a loss to imagine how the contrary can take place. Association there will assuredly be; and we have reason to think that the greatest advantages for producing the most delightful kind of it will be afforded. It would, then, be passing strange if those persons who have derived the purest satisfaction from mutual friendship and esteem on earth, should feel no desire to recognise their former friends and beloved companions; nor would it be less strange if no means of gratifying such a desire should be afforded. We are not able, it is true, to judge very accurately by what means the recognition will be effected, as we are strangers to the medium of intercourse

between disembodied spirits; but we conclude, from the nature of our affections, that a strong desire will be felt for a renewal of the intercourse of friendship, esteem, and love; and we certainly can assign no reason why it should remain ungratified.

God himself is the author of those pure and strong affections by which good men are united upon earth; and it is altogether contrary to the course of his proceeding to suppose that they will be at once suspended, and cease for ever. This would be to deteriorate rather than improve the happiness of his servants; and, as far as we are able to perceive, would be a disappointment of expectations that are not merely agreeable to his will, but of which he himself is the first cause and origin. "We know," says the beloved disciple, "that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren:" and it is, I think, impossible to conceive that the personal attachments

that have been generated on earth, by means of this change will be merged into I know not what general and indiscriminate feeling in heaven.

During those anxious moments which generally precede the departure of good men out of this world, one of the principal alleviations to which they have recourse is the expectation that they will shortly be reunited with those excellent persons that have gone before them, and who were their most highly-valued and beloved companions during the years that have passed away. I could as easily, I own, believe that Divine power has given existence in vain to some parts of its creation, as that Divine goodness intends to frustrate such expectations.*

II. It may still be said, Do the Scriptures, the only sure guide in such matters,

* I am unwilling to encumber the text with quotations from ancient writers; but I beg in this note to remind my classical readers of two passages relative to the subject that is discussed above. They

afford any satisfactory information respecting this subject? and, in reply, I shall express my full belief that they do. We are told that when our Saviour was trans-

are far from being recondite, but they derive great value from the sentiments which are contained in them.

"O præclarum diem cum ad illud divinum animorum concilium cætumque proficiscar, cumque ex hac turba et colluvione discedam! Proficiscar enim non ad eos solum viros, de quibus ante dixi: sed etiam ad Catonem meum, quo nemo vir melior natus est, nemo pietate præstantior: cujus a me corpus crematum est: quod contra decuit ab illo meum. Animus vero non me deserens, sed respectans, in ea profecto loca discessit, quo mihi ipsi cernebat esse veniendum. Quem ego meum casum fortiter ferre visus sum: non quod æquo animo ferrem: sed me ipse consolabar, existimans, non longinquum inter nos digressum et discessum fore." —*Cicero de Senect.*

"Οὐ πείθω, ἔφη, ὦ ἄνδρες, Κρίτωνα, ὡς ἐγώ εἰμι οὗτος ὁ Σώκρατης, ὁ νυνὶ διαλεγόμενος, καὶ διατάττων ἕκαστα τῶν λεγομένων· αλλ' οἴεταί με ἐκεῖνον εἶναι, ὃν ὄψεται ὀλίγον ὕστερον νεκρὸν, καὶ ἐρωτᾷ πῶς δεῖ με θάπτειν. Ὅτι δὲ ἐγὼ πάλαι πολὺν λόγον πεποίημαι, ὡς ἐπειδὰν πίω τὸ φάρμακον, οὐκέτι ὑμῖν παραμενῶ, ἀλλ' οἰχήσομαι ἀπιὼν εἰς μακάρων δή τινας εὐδαιμόνιας, ταῦτά μοι δοκῶ αὐτῷ ἄλλως λέγειν, παραμυθούμενος ἅμα μὲν ὑμᾶς, ἅμα δ' ἐμαυτόν."—*Plato, Phæd.*

figured, there appeared unto him Moses and Elias, who conversed with him. These illustrious men were not, indeed, contemporaries on earth; but, notwithstanding this, it is altogether unlikely that they were strangers to each other before this meeting with the divine Redeemer. It is little less than certain that they had enjoyed long intercourse with each other, as well as with the perfected spirits of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and thousands of others who had ascended to paradise. Many of these had been united on earth by the bonds of holy affection; and it is altogether incredible that these bonds were severed at death, and that no reunion took place in the exalted condition to which they were raised.

The expiring malefactor, who confessed Christ upon the cross, was assured by his Saviour that within a few hours they should meet in paradise; surely not without mutual acquaintance, or the

exercise of the strong affections which the extraordinary circumstances in which they had been placed must have called into being and operation. Who can believe that Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, who are living to God, while their decomposed bodies are probably scattered to the extremities of the earth, are strangers to each other; each assured that the others are sharing in the felicity which he enjoys, but placed altogether beyond the possibility of personal intercourse and mutual affection?

When the author of the Epistle to the Thessalonians undertook to console the mourning relatives and friends of some that had lately been removed from their embrace by death, he effects his purpose by reminding them that it was altogether unbecoming their hopes to sorrow as those who had no hope, for he says, "Them that sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." It may, I am aware, be objected that this refers to the general

resurrection at the last day; and this passage of Scripture is supposed, by those who discredit the existence of an intermediate state between death and the resurrection, to afford a powerful argument in their favour. But it seems to be a very ineffectual mode of administering consolation under such bereavements, to assure the mourners that they shall meet their friends again after some thousands of years have elapsed. This would have the appearance of mocking their hopes, and wear the semblance of trifling with their grief. The persons, whose death was the source of sorrow, are represented as having slept in Jesus,* and being destined to appear in company with him at the last great day. The reasonable conclusion to be drawn from these expressions, when taken in harmony with other declarations of Scripture, is, that they who have died in the faith of

* Τοὺς κοιμηθέντας διὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ. 1 Thess. iv. 14.

Jesus, are at present with him: "absent from the body, present with the Lord."* The blessed Saviour having finished the work of redemption, ascended to the heavenly state, and, as seems probable, the first trophy of his conquest was the reception of the crucified and penitent malefactor; for he also ascended into the presence of his compassionate and powerful Redeemer, and there he still is, not alone certainly—the spirits of the just, as they are freed by death from the prison of mortality, ascend at their departure into the presence of Christ too, and there they dwell, looking forward to the general resurrection, when they will be found swelling the train, and augmenting the triumph of Him "who is to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe."

This is what, in my judgment, is to be taken as the comprehensive import of

* 2 Cor. v. 8.

the consolatory exhortation which the inspired Apostle addressed to the Christians of Thessalonica, and through them to Christians of all succeeding ages. Unless the whole be taken as inclusive of what has now been stated, it loses its character of consolation, for it is little, if at all adapted to its purpose; besides which it loses sight of the direct and effectual topics of consolation, that are to be drawn from other portions of the sacred writings.

As then there is sufficient reason to assure us of the fact, that good men are united with their friends and associates in the state of bliss, to which death instantly transmits them, we are at liberty to anticipate some of the satisfactions that will arise from meeting those, with and for whom, we have prayed during our pilgrimage upon earth.

1. The first of these which I shall specify, is the delight, the mutual delight, that will be experienced by pious ministers, and those persons who were

converted and edified by their ministrations.

No sentiment of affection is purer, or more pleasing, than that which actuates the bosoms of those persons who have derived their earliest religious impressions from the ministry of the gospel, towards the beloved and honoured instruments by which they have been instructed and improved. St. Paul, speaking of the feelings of his Galatian converts towards himself, says, "I bear you record that if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me." Some of my readers will, I trust, be found not unconscious of kindred sentiments. What the affection of the Apostle towards them was, he describes by the remarkable and significant figure which is embodied in his words, "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed within you."*

* Gal. iv. 15, 19.

It happens, in too many cases, as in that of the Galatian converts, that these feelings of reciprocal affection are weakened by time, and diminished by the various occurrences of life, which have a painful influence in checking their flow; but in every instance where genuine piety has been imparted by such means, there abides to the end a warm and steady regard. This especially takes place when the christian intercourse of the pastor with the fruits of his ministry continues unbroken through considerable spaces of time, and they live in the frequent interchange of intellectual and christian association. The faithful pastor looks on such persons as the pledges of his present usefulness, and the future crown of his labours; he regards them as his "glory and joy," while, on their part, he is revered and esteemed as their chief benefactor, their most faithful and disinterested counsellor and friend. The day in which spirits so congenial will be

confirmed in undecaying friendship, in the presence, and beneath the smiles of their exalted Redeemer, to whose love they owe all their bliss, will be a day worthy of everlasting remembrance. It will bring an infinite recompense for "every work of faith, and every labour of love," and be regarded through everlasting ages as the commencement of "a joy unspeakable and full of glory."

In that day wise and faithful ministers will be greeted also by many who have reaped the blessed fruits of their labours, though mutually unknown: the former will be filled with inexpressible satisfaction, by seeing that their exertions were successful beyond their knowledge and hope; the latter will press forward to acknowledge the greatest obligations, and to embrace with tears of joy, if tears of any kind can flow in that blissful region, their most valued, though hitherto unacknowledged benefactors. The fervent prayers and earnest exertions by which

their lives on earth were marked, will then be recollected no more to be repeated, but exchanged for the songs of praise, and the united hallelujahs of the new Jerusalem.

2. Sentiments of similar character will then be expressed between pious relatives and kindred, wise and upright fathers, devout and tender mothers, dutiful, pious, and affectionate children. These are now often the objects of deep solicitude and unnumbered supplications, and not unfrequently of poignant anguish; but then they meet no more to be separated by the untoward and afflictive events of this mortal and transient scene: no more lamentation over blighted expectations, and darkened prospects, and early and untimely graves. And then will many an affectionate, anxious, and long-tried parent, welcome, with open arms and warm embrace, the profligate and prodigal sons, over whom they grieved, for whom they poured forth incessant sup-

plications, but whom they regarded as lost, yet now find numbered among the brands which almighty power and love have plucked from the devouring flames. O what raptures will expand every bosom, and what ascriptions of praise will fill every mouth, to Him who is the fountain of all this joy, the wise and gracious Author of all this unknown delight!

3. The earnest supplications that have been offered, with unfailing constancy, by Christians for the happiness and salvation of the millions of human kind that are enslaved by idolatry—the victims of ignorance and superstition, and the vassals of base affections, and of infernal passions —will then meet their full reward. The pious and benevolent persons who have thus, in combination with their active endeavours, laboured to promote the truest welfare of their misguided fellow-creatures, will reap an ample harvest, when they shall behold multitudes redeemed out of

every nation, and kindred, and people, and tongue, flowing to the celestial city, and offering the homage of fervent gratitude, and elevated praise to "Him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb, for ever." "Thy gates," O city of God, "shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night, that men may bring into thee the forces of the Gentiles; and that their kings may be brought."*

With these imperfect hints I shall conclude my undertaking; adding only an earnest hope that Divine power and grace may render it, in some degree, conducive to the improvement and consolation of those to whom it is now respectfully committed.

* Isa. lx. 11.

THE END.

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